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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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by Brett Halliday

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

KILLER'S EVE

BY BRETT HALLIDAY

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAKERS

Since his first sale (a short story to AHMM in 1966), JOHN LUTZ (*Tough*) has had published four novels and more than one hundred mystery stories. A recent issue of THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE devoted four pages to an interview with him and a checklist of his stories, so we won't go into that. However, he's updated and capsulized the information with: *What I do mostly is live in a house in a near suburb of St. Louis and write, drink too much coffee and talk too much to the dog, who is herself considering becoming a writer. My wife views all this as an odd state of affairs not necessarily conducive to top mental health. The dog disagrees.* "Tough" was rejected by one of the other mystery magazines as living up to its title.

*I'm 32 years old, says JOHN C. BOLAND (*Mad Hare*) and I've been a newspaper man since just after high school (passing through 8 dailies in 12 years). For the last couple of years I've been on the staff of a weekly financial magazine. "Mad Hare" is my sixth short story sale. MSMM published number 2 in January 1979.*

JON L. BREEN (*A Quiet Death*) writes: *I have one correction to make in the biographical squib on me in the January MSMM. Rita and I were married in 1970, not 1979. The reference will doubtless confuse a lot of friends who know we've been hanging around together lots longer than that.*

PERCY SPURLARK PARKER (*The Vampire Man*) says: *I'm a former Regional Director with the Mystery Writers of America. A novel of mine, GOOD GIRLS DON'T GET MURDERED, was published a few years ago by Scribner's. I've had several short stories published since, and even an inclusion in the current Mystery Writers' Handbook. I'm in retail management, which has*

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

provided my main source of income. However, writing is much more than a hobby to me. I've been committing murder and mayhem at the typewriter for twenty-two years now. It's the only legal way of committing a crime I've been able to figure out.

ARTHUR MOORE (*A Little Light Larceny*) would like us to believe that he was born and educated in California, later the Blaine Institute of Art in Oregon. Started out as a newspaperman as early as high school, then a stint on the LA Examiner, from there to advertising. Worked in ad agencies till the US Army's long arm slung him into the Signal Corps where he worked on training films and documentary and propaganda films for five years. With the war over, he went into advertising again, produced TV commercials, documentaries and entertainment films . . . and began to rewrite scripts that didn't work on the screen. Wrote a short story and sold it to Cavalier, and subsequently sold dozens of stories and articles to a flock of magazines. Having a deep interest in early America, he started selling westerns and historical novels — to date about 40, with 4 novels awaiting publication. Just signed a new contract with Pinnacle for a trilogy with locale of pre-Revolution New England.

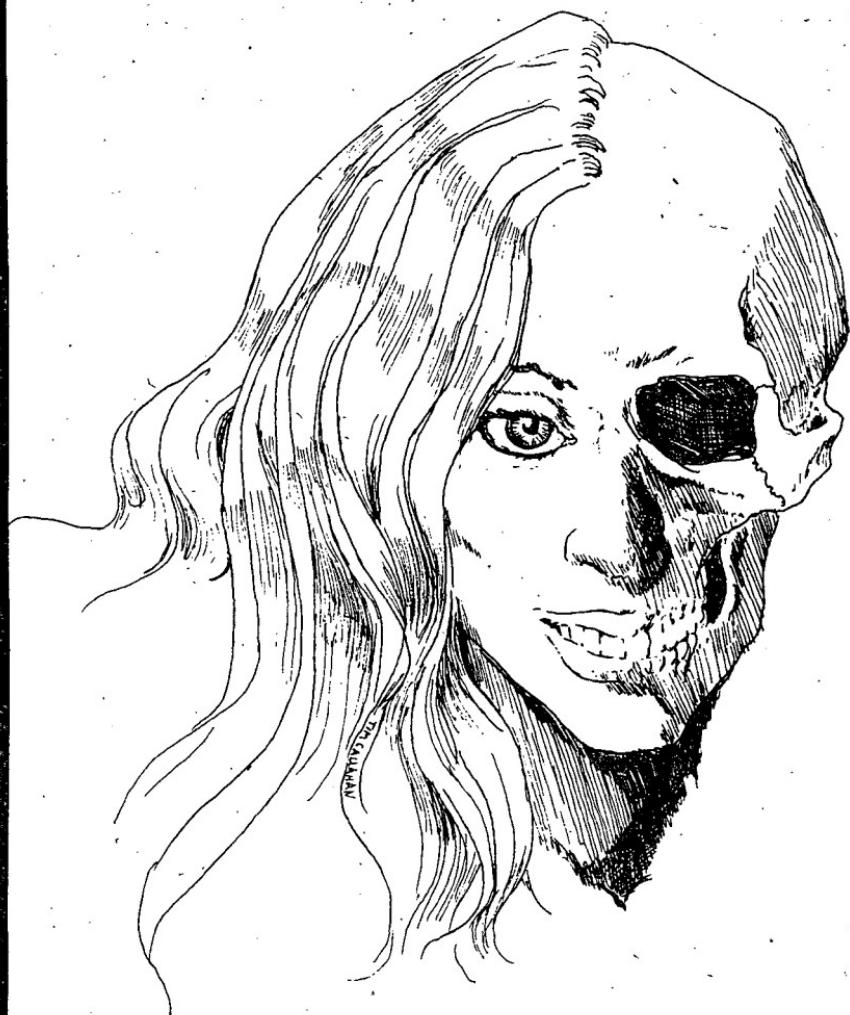
He adds:

Modesty restrains me from mentioning my behind-the-lines capture of Adolph Hitler, toasting his toes, etc. His various pieces were crammed into 105mm shells and fired into the air as part of the Arbor Day celebration of 1945. The story of the bunker in Berlin is of course sheer nonsense. All this will be told in my memoirs.

The lovely and talented VICKI SHAULL CARLETON (*The Final Rejection*) sent us the following mini-bio:

I was born in 1949. It was a dark and stormy night when I first saw the light of day in a cabin in Warsaw. (Oops! that's someone else's biography!) But seriously, before turning to full-time writing, I worked as a waitress, sales girl, typist, counselor, cashier and child care aide (which I still do on weekends with my nursery class). A decade ago I appeared as a singer twice on a local television show and used to edit and publish my own family newsletter. Currently, I write a column for an international fan club, stories and poetry for fanzines and have several stories off to the publishers for consideration. This is my first sale. ●

KILLER'S EVE



By Brett Halliday

A LEISURELY LATE LUNCH HAD MIKE SHAYNE feeling pretty good when he came into his Flagler Street office. There were no pressing cases on his agenda right now, and he was in a mood to close down the business for a few days and take Lucy Hamilton, his lovely secretary, on a deep-sea fishing jaunt. The last few months had seen them involved in several nerve-wracking cases, and private detectives and their secretaries needed vacations as much as anyone.

He was whistling a tuneless air when he opened the office door, strolled in, and tossed his hat on the rack. Lucy raised her brown eyes where she was working at her desk, and Shayne said, "Hi, Angel."

"Hello, Michael," Lucy said softly. She nodded to the door leading into Shayne's private office. "You have a visitor."

Shayne raised bushy red eyebrows that matched his usually rumpled shock of hair. "A client?" he asked.

"I think she wants to be." Lucy lowered her voice even more. "Be careful when you talk to her, Michael. She's a witch."

Shayne grinned. "Come on, Angel. It's not like you to judge people." He strode across the room and opened the door to the inner office.

A woman stood up from the chair in front of his desk, turned around, and faced him.

Shayne stopped in his tracks.

She was tall, and carried herself with a bearing that could only be described as regal. Long black hair, as dark as the most stygian midnight Shayne had ever seen, framed a rather pale face and then fell almost to her waist. She was wearing a simple but stylish black dress that was low cut enough to emphasize the thrust of her high, full breasts. She smiled slightly at him, and Shayne realized that her eyes were almost as dark as her hair.

"Mr. Shayne?" she asked quietly in a throaty voice.

"I'm Mike Shayne," he said with a nod. "Can I help you?"

"I'm sure you can. I wish to hire you." Her eyes were frankly appraising as she gazed at him.

Shayne glanced back over his shoulder at Lucy, whose face was impassive. He gave a mental shrug, stepped into his office, and closed the door behind him.

"Why don't you tell me about it?" he said as he went around behind the desk and sat down. The woman took her seat. Her dark eyes locked with Shayne's over the desk. There was an intensity in them that was strangely compelling.

"My name is Martine Dufour," she said. "To be quite candid, Mr.

Shayne, and to get this out of the way, let me tell you that I am a witch."

"A witch," Shayne said slowly.

"A believer in the ancient religion of Wicca, if you will. And please, no comments about my appearance. I looked the way I do long before I found the Old Ways."

"I think you look pretty good," Shayne said, "to be quite candid."

She gave him that slight smile again, then went on, "I understand that you have a reputation as a highly competent private investigator. I want to hire you to recover an item which has been stolen from me."

"The Miami Police Department has a whole division that handles robberies. Why bring this to me and not them?"

She pushed back a strand of the raven's-wing hair that had fallen into her face. "This is no simple burglary that I'm talking about, Mr. Shayne. It is a very delicate matter, and I wish as little publicity as possible."

"Then it must have something to do with your . . . beliefs."

"That's right. It has everything to do with them. You see, I am the leader of a coven — the priestess, if you will — and the item I wish you to recover is a book."

"A book?" Shayne raised his eyebrows again.

"Yes. We call it . . . The Tome of Doom."

Shayne's fingers came up and began to tug at his earlobe. After a moment, he frowned and pulled out a cigarette. As he lit it, he said, "What's in this book?"

Martine Dufour took a deep breath. "Our lives. It contains the spells, the rituals, all the things that we hold sacred."

"Is it valuable?"

"To myself and to my fellow believers, it is. To anyone else . . ." She spread her hands and shrugged. "It's quite old, and I suppose it would have some value as an antiquity, but its only real value is to followers of Wicca."

"Do you have any idea who took it?"

"I know exactly who took it," she declared.

Shayne exhaled a cloud of smoke, shook his head in puzzlement, and said, "Then why do you need me?"

"I need you to deal with the man who has it now. His name is Peter Vallon."

"How do you know he has it?"

"He is the only one with a reason to take it. You see, Mr. Shayne, Peter Vallon is a warlock."

Somehow, Shayne had been expecting her to say that.

Martine seemed slightly uncomfortable as she went on, "Peter and I were leaders of the coven. I as the priestess and he was my assistant, second only to myself in the hierarchy. We — we were lovers as well. But he tired of both facets of our relationship and left me to form his own coven. His leaving was . . . not pleasant."

"So there were hard feelings on his part and he took this book with him when he left, to get back at you?"

"Exactly, Mr. Shayne. Also, he would have a much easier time forming and organizing his own coven with the Tome of Doom in his possession."

Shayne leaned back in his chair and considered. Martine was still watching him intently. After a few seconds of thought, he said, "All you want me to do is get this book back from Vallon?"

"Yes. All I am interested in is the safe return of the volume. And I don't really care how you go about it, so long as the book is returned to me by tomorrow night."

"Why the time limit?"

"What is the date today, Mr. Shayne?" Again that cryptic smile.

Shayne didn't see what the hell the date had to do with anything, but he played along with her. "It's October 30th," he said.

"And tomorrow's?"

Shayne saw the light. "October 31st," he said slowly. "Hallowe'en."

Martine nodded solemnly. "It is our Sabbat, Mr. Shayne, the holiest of our holy days, the day when all witches gather in a celebration of the Old Ways. I must have the book by Hallowe'en night."

Shayne ran knobby fingers through his coarse red hair and came to an abrupt decision. "All right," he said. "I'll take the case. I'll need a retainer, and I'll have my secretary draw up a contract."

Martine nodded, took a checkbook from a small purse in her lap, and wrote out a check. She tore it out, handed it across the desk to Shayne, and said, "Will that be satisfactory?"

Shayne glanced at the check and saw that it was made out in the amount of \$5000. He looked back up at Martine and said, "That's fine. That book must really mean a lot to you."

"My beliefs are everything to me, Mr. Shayne. The check is good, I assure you."

Shayne folded the check and slipped it into his wallet. "Now, about the book," he said. "Can you describe it?"

"Certainly. It is bound in dark brown leather, with a golden clasp and a lock."

"A lock?"

"We are protective of our secrets, Mr. Shayne. The things that are written in the Tome of Doom are not for unbelievers."

Shayne nodded. "That makes sense, I suppose. How big is it?"

"Not awfully large. Perhaps six inches by eight inches, and an inch-and-a-half thick."

Shayne made a few notes detailing the book's description, then said, "You're certain that Vallon took it?"

Martine nodded. "We had been arguing, and then Peter left in a tremendous fury. It wasn't long until I noticed that the Tome was missing."

"Missing from where?"

"It is normally kept on the altar in our temple, which is also my home." She gave Shayne the address, and he jotted it down as well.

"Where can I find Vallon?"

"He lives in Miami Beach, and he has an office here in downtown Miami, in the Garroway Building. The office is Suite 712."

"What kind of business is he in?"

"Public relations."

Shayne arched one eyebrow. The idea of a warlock running a PR business seemed faintly ludicrous, but he didn't voice his thoughts. Instead, he said, "All right, I'll do what I can. I should be able to retrieve this book for you, and I'll be in touch with you as soon as I've got it."

Martine nodded and stood up. "Thank you, Mr. Shayne. I appreciate your taking the case. You can see why I hesitated to go to the police with it."

"The cops might have been a little leery of it, all right," Shayne allowed.

He opened the door, ushered her through the outer office; and into the hall. As she left, she gave him another of those half-smiles over her shoulder.

Shayne closed the door and turned back to Lucy, who asked, "Did you take the case, Michael?"

"Yeah, she wants me to recover some kind of crazy witches' book before Hallowe'en night. Claims her warlock ex-boyfriend stole it from her when he left to start his own coven."

Lucy's eyes widened. "You're joking, aren't you Michael?"

Shayne shook his head. "You were right, Angel; she *is* a witch. At least she says she is, and I guess that's the only requirement." He snagged his hat off the rack and settled it on his red head. "I think I'll go pay a visit to Tim. A wacky story like this ought to be right up his alley."

II

SHAYNE FOUND TIMOTHY ROURKE in the lanky reporter's second home, the City Room of the Miami *Daily News*. Rourke was bent over a typewriter, pecking at it furiously with two fingers. He glanced up at his old friend and said, "Hi, Mike. How's it going?"

Reversing a straight chair, Shayne sat down on it and leaned his brawny arms on the back of it. "All right, I suppose," he said. "I just took a case you might be interested in."

The pace of Rourke's typing hadn't slowed down. "What's that?" he asked without looking up.

"I was just hired by a witch."

That got a reaction on Rourke's part. The feature writer's fingers slowed on the typewriter, and his deep-set eyes looked up at Shayne. "Did you say you were just hired by a witch?"

"Yeah," Shayne grinned. "A witch."

"That's what I thought you said. What in the hell for?"

"To recover a stolen book of spells and rituals called the Tome of Doom."

Rourke shook his head slowly. He said, "Look, Mike, I know that Hallowe'en is tomorrow, but if you're putting me on, you really ought to come up with something a little less cornball."

Shayne held up a hand. "It's the truth, Tim. Lucy can swear that the woman was there in my office, and that she was a witch."

Rourke stabbed a cigarette into his mouth and lit it deftly. "How did you know she was a witch?" he demanded. "By the pointed black hat and the wart on her nose?"

"Actually, she was a damn nice-looking woman. I'm serious about this, Tim, and I could use your help."

"You're serious about something called the Tome of Doom? Good Lord, Mike, it sounds like something out of an old pulp magazine!"

Shayne shrugged. "Maybe so. But just because I'm interested in it doesn't mean I believe in what it says. What I believe in is the fee that the lady's going to pay me to recover it."

"Now that sounds more like the Mike Shayne I know. How do I come into it, though?"

Shayne lit a cigarette of his own and said, "I'm curious about this witchcraft business. I've never had any dealings with witches and warlocks, and I'd like to have a better idea about what I'm getting into. Do you know anybody who could fill me in?"

Rourke leaned back in his chair and frowned as he leafed through his mental files. After a moment, he snapped his fingers and said, "I

know just the guy you should talk to. His name is Colin Alderson, and he lives right here in Miami."

"Who is he?"

"He's a writer and researcher who's made a specialty out of the occult. I did a piece on him last year when he published a book about demon possession. He struck me as a guy who knows a lot of weird things. He can tell you all about witchcraft if anybody can."

"Does he believe in it?"

Rourke laughed. "He's like you; he believes in the money tied up in it. He's had two books on the best-sellers lists in the last three years. I'd say he's a little bit more open-minded than most about it, though. According to his books, he's witnessed a lot of strange things personally."

"Have you got an address on him?"

"No, but he's in the phone book." Rourke pulled a battered directory from his desk and looked up the address. Shayne wrote it down in his notebook and the lifted his rangy frame from the chair.

"Thanks, Tim," he said. "I think I'll go pay Alderson a visit."

"Wait a minute!" Rourke exclaimed. "What about the rest of the story, Mike? How about some details?"

Shayne shrugged. "It's a little early in the game for that, isn't it? This could turn out to be a milk run, Tim. Not all of my cases turn into free-for-all's."

Rourke snorted and said, "Just ninety-nine percent of them. All right, Mike, but whether it makes a story or not, I expect to hear more about it. All this business about witches has gotten my curiosity up."

"Sure, Tim." Shayne waved a hand at the newsman and strolled out of the city room, heading for the street and his Buick.

He pointed the car toward the address Rourke had given him for Colin Alderson. It was in the southeastern part of the city, almost far enough out to be considered the suburbs, and when Shayne found the street, he saw that it was a residential area, with older houses set behind large lawns and palm trees. There was an air about the neighborhood that said it had been affluent not long before, but was now struggling a little bit. Shayne found the house he was looking for and piloted the Buick into an asphalt driveway that was starting to crack in a few places.

The house had three stories and was surrounded by shrubs. A wide verandah ran along the front of it, and Shayne climbed a short flight of steps to reach it. Overgrown plants in hanging baskets lined the porch, cutting off much of the light and making the place gloomy. Shayne saw that the knocker in the middle of the heavy front door was carved in the

shape of a human head. Closer examination showed that the features of the face were contorted, as if in agony. All the curtains in the house were drawn, and the place seemed to be dead and deserted. Shayne hadn't paid much attention to the roof. He wondered if there were gargoyles on it.

He didn't use the knocker, instead rapping his knuckles on the thick wooden door. He knocked sharply, then pushed his hat back slightly on his red hair to wait.

A moment went by, then the door swung open smoothly. Shayne was a little surprised that it didn't creak, and he had half-expected a bat to come flitting out. He said, "Mr. Alderson?"

The man who opened the door said, "Yes, what can I do for you?" He was medium height, with a rather thin face, dark curly hair, and piercing eyes. He wore slacks and a pullover sweater and didn't look at all menacing.

Shayne identified himself and then said, "I was told that you're an authority on the occult. I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions."

"Of course," Alderson stepped back and ushered Shayne into the house. "Come on in. I was working on my new book, but to be honest, I need a break."

"This shouldn't take long," Shayne said as he stepped into the house. He glanced around. The inside of the place was full of shadows and every bit as gloomy as the outside had promised it would be.

"Come on back to my study," Alderson said. He led the way down a long hall that was lined with paintings and went on, "I believe I've read about some of your cases in the newspapers, Mr. Shayne. Your work must be fascinating."

Shayne looked at a few of the pictures on the wall as he followed Alderson. They showed various scenes of human suffering, from plague to war-to torture. The predominant colors seemed to be shades of red. Shayne's mouth quirked. A cheery place, this.

Alderson led him into a study that was lined on three walls with books. The fourth wall was taken up by a display of artifacts that made Shayne's eyebrows draw down in a slight frown. There were thin-bladed daggers, broad-bladed short swords, a mace with wicked, sharp studs, tall wooden masks carved in grotesque patterns, and a richly woven tapestry that showed a looming, evil face hanging over a huddled mass of terrified humanity.

Alderson sat down behind a big desk that was littered with papers and said, "Now, how can I help you, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne took a seat on the other side of the desk and said, "Have you

ever heard of the Tome of Doom?"

The occult authority looked up sharply, his dark eyes widening slightly. "The Tome of Doom? Certainly. It's a book of spells and such, used in various kinds of Satan worship and witchcraft. Its origins are rather vague, but it seems to have come down from the time of the Druids. Only a few copies of it exist today."

"Did you know that one of them was in Miami?"

Alderson's eyes widened even more. "I had no idea. Do you know where it is, Mr. Shayne? I'd love to get a look at it."

"I've been hired to get it back from a man who allegedly stole it," Shayne said. "He's supposed to be a warlock, the leader of a rival coven. Sound interesting?"

Alderson was leaning forward now. "Extremely. How can I help you?"

"Tell me about witches and warlocks. I want to know what I'm getting into."

Alderson steepled his fingers on the desk in front of him. "Wicca is a religion, Mr. Shayne," he said. "That's the first thing you have to realize. It's an ancient set of beliefs, predating Christianity. It originated in pagan rites that came about mainly in an effort to increase fertility, both in the land and its inhabitants."

"What about the devil worship angle?"

"Not all covens engage in Satan worship, but many do, believing that the Devil can confer potent power on them. Many of the rituals involve the Devil, who is represented by one of the members of the coven, usually the leader, who wears a mask in the image of Satan. I've never attended a Black Mass, more's the pity, but I've heard a great deal about them. You know that witchcraft is practiced, ah, in the nude?"

Shayne hadn't known that. He wondered if that was why Martine Dufour had attained the position of high priestess. He said, "Hallowe'en is an important day for them, isn't it?"

Alderson nodded and replied, "The most important day of the year. There are four Sabbats in a year, but All Hallow's Eve is the most significant, always celebrated with a Black Mass."

"A coven that had a copy of the Tome of Doom would certainly want it back for Hallowe'en if it had been stolen, wouldn't they?" Shayne mused.

"Absolutely. There is usually a great deal of rivalry between covens anyway, and if one stole the Tome of Doom from another, that would almost be cause for a mystical war."

Shayne nodded and tugged for a moment at his earlobe. "Sounds

like I'm getting into a situation that could turn ugly."

"Anytime you're dealing with such volatile beliefs, you have to be careful," Alderson agreed. "I've learned that much in my research."

"How many people are in a coven?"

"Thirteen is the usual number. There can be less, but never more."

"How widespread is this stuff?"

Alderson lifted his shoulders. "It's hard to say. As you can imagine, most believers don't broadcast their beliefs. They fear persecution from an intolerant society, and they're right most of the time. We've come a long way from the days of the Salem trials, but people still have a lot of hangups about anything occult. To answer your question the best I can, though, the practice of witchcraft is probably much more widespread than the average person thinks, but not as prevalent as the believers themselves would have you think. There are probably a few hundred members here in Florida."

"And at least two covens here in Miami," Shayne grunted. "Thanks, Alderson. I appreciate the information. I think I'd better step lightly while I'm mixed up with these people, even if I don't believe all their hoopla."

Alderson nodded grimly, "Many witches don't believe in using their powers for evil, but others have no such compunctions." He spread his hands. "I'm not saying that they can do all they claim they can, evil spells and the like, but people can become pretty ugly when their beliefs are challenged. I've learned to be objective about things, Mr. Shayne, and there are times I just keep my mouth shut and try not to antagonize anyone."

Shayne stood up. "I don't like handling things with kid gloves," he declared. "I guess it doesn't make much sense to deliberately rile people, though." He waved a hand at the gloomy trappings of the study. "Do you mind if I ask you a question? Do you believe in all this stuff, or do you just write about it?"

Alderson smiled thinly as he rose. "I'm not the skeptic I once was about the occult, but I'm also not convinced by all of it, either. I keep the place looking like this because it helps to stimulate the creative juices. People read my books for a little vicarious horror, Mr. Shayne, and it's a lot easier to write the things that scare them when I'm a little nervous myself."

Shayne chuckled. "Makes sense. Well, thanks again. I'll watch myself on this case."

Alderson held up his hand as Shayne started to turn away. "Mr. Shayne . . ." he said. "Could I ask a favor of you?"

"Sure."

"Could I accompany you on your investigation? I'm sure it would be fascinating; and I might get a chance to examine the Tome of Doom."

"I don't know," Shayne said slowly. "I usually work alone."

"You don't have to worry about me. I've learned how to take care of myself over the years."

Alderson had been helpful, and the man seemed to know his way around. Shayne considered for a moment; then said, "All right. As long as you don't put any of it in a book without getting my client's permission. I don't need any lawsuits."

Alderson smiled eagerly. "You don't need to worry about that. Let me get my coat and I'll be right with you."

Alderson hurried out of the room, and Shayne found himself alone in the place. As he looked around the dark room, with its shelves of old leatherbound books and its display of the tools of violence, he felt a little tickle of something along his spine. This place was enough to give anyone the creeps.

Even a big redheaded private eye.

III

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, Shayne and Alderson were in an elevator, riding up to the seventh floor of the Garroway Building in downtown Miami. Shayne had checked the directory in the lobby downstairs, and sure enough, VALON ENTERPRISES — PUBLIC RELATIONS was located in Suite 712.

The elevator let them out into a thickly-carpeted hallway with frosted-glass doors lining it. Shayne opened the door to Suite 712 and entered the office, Alderson right behind him.

Soft music was playing over a concealed speaker, and the office was elegantly appointed, with even thicker carpet than the hall. There was a desk on one wall of the room, and another door leading to an inner office.

Behind the desk was a young woman with short blond hair. She gave Shayne and Alderson a dazzling smile and said, "Can I help you?"

"We'd like to see Mr. Vallon," Shayne said.

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No, but we're not here on business. It's a personal matter."

The receptionist frowned prettily. "I'm not sure Mr. Vallon is available right now . . ."

"Could you check?" Shayne asked. "Tell him it's about a certain book."

She looked slightly puzzled, but the girl picked up the telephone

from her immaculate desk and punched a button on it. After a second, she said, "Mr. Vallon, there are two gentlemen out here who would like to see you. They don't have an appointment, but they say that it's a personal matter, about a book." She listened for a moment, then covered the mouthpiece and said to Shayne, "Your names, please, gentlemen?"

"I'm Mike Shayne," the detective told her. "This is Mr. Alderson."

She relayed the names to Vallon on the telephone, then hung up. "You can go right in," she said, clearly puzzled as to why her employer had consented to see them.

Shayne opened the door and stepped into the inner office. The writer closed the door behind them. Shayne looked across the large office at the man seated behind another desk. Peter Vallon stood up to greet them, and Shayne saw that he was tall, with a slight stoop to his shoulders. His hair was a dark blond, and he wore a moustache. His suit was a conservative grey, and the entire office was done in shades of black and white, giving a stark quality. A large window or one wall looked out at downtown Miami and Biscayne Bay beyond.

Vallon didn't offer to shake hands, and neither did Shayne. The PR man said, "What's this all about?"

"I'm Mike Shayne, this is Colin Alderson," Shayne said. "I take it you're Peter Vallon."

"That's right. And I'm also busy, so shall we get on with it? I know you, Shayne, or at least I've heard of you. And you as well, Alderson. I don't know what you want with me, though."

"How about the Tome of Doom?" Shayne asked quietly.

Vallon's nostrils flared. In a low, urgent voice, he asked, "Did Martine send you?"

"That's right," Shayne said. "I've come for the book, and if you just hand it over now, there won't be any trouble."

Vallon made a curt slashing motion with his hand. "No! I won't discuss the matter here, Shayne. I prefer to keep the different areas of my life separate."

"If that's the case, it would be better for you to give me the book without any fuss. Then there won't be any stink about it."

Shayne knew that Alderson was fidgeting behind him. The writer hadn't expected this blunt approach, but Shayne saw it as the best way to proceed. Vallon's operation here looked like a profitable set-up, and it might be worth giving up the book if that would keep Shayne from rocking the boat.

"I could have you thrown out of here, you know," Vallon said grimly.

"And the ruckus would bring the cops," Shayne shot back. "I'd feel obligated to explain to them just what it was all about."

Vallon's face was a taut mask. "I was about ready to leave for the day," he said. "If the two of you would follow me to my house, we can settle this matter there."

Shayne nodded brusquely. "All right. Just don't try to give us the slip."

"I won't. I want this settled as much as you do."

He strode out of the office, Shayne and Alderson coming along behind him, and he paused only long enough to say to the receptionist, "I'm leaving for the day now, Vicky. You can go on home, too."

She was even more puzzled by this turn of events, but she was covering her typewriter and reaching for her purse as the three men left the office.

There was an uneasy silence in the elevator as they rode down together. Vallon turned to Shayne in the lobby and said, "I'll have to get my car from the garage. It's a blue Mercedes."

"We'll be waiting for you," Shayne promised.

The Buick was parked at the curb. Shayne and Alderson got into it and watched Vallon enter the parking garage adjacent to the building. Alderson gave Shayne a dubious glance and said, "I thought you had decided not to try to antagonize Vallon."

"I play the cards that feel right at the time," Shayne said. "You notice he didn't even try to deny that he has the book?"

"Yes," Alderson said. "You do seem to have convinced him that you mean business. But what if he tries to slip away from us now?"

"He's smart enough to know that it wouldn't do him any good," Shayne said. "He knows that I'd just show up at his house later."

A moment later, they saw Vallon cruise by in a large blue Mercedes, and Shayne started the engine of his own car. He pulled out behind Vallon and fell directly behind him. This was no tail job, and there was no point in being secretive.

As they drove, Shayne and Alderson discussed the seeming incongruity of there being practicing witches in the middle of a modern metropolis like Miami. Shayne was a little surprised that a man like Vallon would be involved in such a thing, but Alderson assured him that the followers of Wicca came from all walks of life.

"Almost anyone you see on the street could be a witch," Alderson said. "From the cleaning woman to the corporation president. All that's required is the desire to believe, and the desire for the power that goes with belief."

"And you think there might be something to it?"

"I saw a man in England wither up and die in a matter of days once," Alderson said. "He was a farmer, and he got involved in a dispute over boundary lines with a neighbor. The neighbor was friends with a woman reputed to be a witch, and she laid a curse on the first man. I can't say what exactly caused it, but he was dead, all the same."

Shayne rubbed his thumb along his rugged jawline, but he didn't say anything.

Vallon led them across the Bay, to an expensive oceanfront home in Miami Beach. Shayne pulled up behind the Mercedes as it stopped in a circular drive. He and Alderson got out and met Vallon at the front door.

The PR man unlocked the door and went in first. Shayne and Alderson followed him through a living room that didn't look very lived-in, to a small study and den that overlooked a flower garden and the beach.

"Would you like a drink?" Vallon asked, and Shayne could tell that it was an effort for the man to be polite.

He said, "Cognac, if you've got it, a beer if you don't."

Vallon poured cognac in a tumbler as Alderson said, "Nothing for me, thanks." Vallon handed Shayne his drink, then poured himself a healthy shot of Scotch.

Downing the liquor, Vallon said, "All right, Shayne, let's get down to cases. You want the book, and I'm not going to give it to you. Where does that leave us?"

"In a bad spot," Shayne said, sipping his drink. "You already know that Martine Dufour hired me to get the book back, and I intend to earn my money."

Vallon laughed, but it wasn't a cheerful sound. "Come now, Shayne," he said, "Martine can't prove ownership of the book, so I would say that possession is what counts in this case. I've got it, and you can't take it away from me. If you try to take it, I'll press charges. So why don't you just go back to Martine and tell her to give it up?"

Alderson cut in, his voice enthusiastic. "Is it really the Tome of Doom? I've heard so much about it!"

Vallon's face twisted in a grimace. "You're almost drooling, aren't you, Alderson? You'd love to get a look at it, so that you could use it as material for one of those sleazy bestsellers of yours that do nothing but pervert the Old Ways. Well, you can rest assured that an opportunist like yourself will never see something as sacred as the Tome of Doom."

Alderson's features had gone taut and angry. Shayne stepped be-

tween the two men and said, "You're right, Vallon, I'm not going to try to strongarm you. At least not yet. I think we can still work something out, though. Like a business deal?"

Vallon frowned. "Are you offering to buy the book back? I didn't think Martine's pride would let her do a think like that."

"It's my idea, not hers. I was hired to get the book back, but she said she didn't care how I did it. So I'm making you an offer."

"How much?"

"That's for you and her to work out. I'll handle the transaction, though, so we'll be sure that Ms. Dufour gets her money's worth."

"You're awfully sure she'll agree to this."

"She'd better, if she's got any sense," Shayne declared. "Any other way is going to cause a lot of trouble, more trouble than the whole thing's worth, probably. So why don't you call her and work the details out?"

Vallon looked thoughtful. "Perhaps that is a good idea. The two of you wait here for a moment, please." He put his empty glass down and left the room.

"I'll say this for you, Mr. Shayne," Alderson said. "You know how to keep people off-balance."

"Make it Mike. And that's exactly what I'm trying to do. Vallon half-expected me to try some rough stuff when we got here. He didn't expect an offer like I made him." Shayne glanced around the room, studied the titles of the books in the shelves. "Novels and textbooks and such. Not an occult title to be seen. You'd never know Vallon was a warlock unless he wanted you to."

Alderson nodded. "Many believers keep up a good front. I assume that Vallon has a special room somewhere in the house, where he keeps his books and regalia, tapers and incense and things like that. If his coven meets here, they would need a fairly large room for their Masses. Do you think Vallon will work out an agreement with your client?"

"I hope so. If he does, and if I'm the go-between, that'll save me the trouble of locating the book. He could have it hidden anywhere."

"You don't think that this Ms. Dufour will resent the fact that you offered Vallon money? She didn't authorize that, did she?"

"No, but she didn't rule it out, either," Shayne grunted. His voice dropped. "Besides, Vallon is making a deal with *her*, not me. There's nothing to stop me from making Vallon take a loss once I get my hands on the book."

Alderson frowned. "That kind of thing could be dangerous." There was a slight tinge of disapproval in his voice as he went on, "Not to

mention a little unfair."

Shayne lit a cigarette and frowned. "It was unfair for Vallon to take the book from its rightful owner, too. Don't waste your sense of justice on him, Colin." He grinned. "Hell, if Martine Dufour wants to pay him off, that's fine with me, too. It's her book, and that makes her the boss."

Shayne finished his cognac and returned the tumbler to the small bar in one corner of the den, then turned as Vallon came back into the room. There was an arrogant smile on the man's face as he said, "I took your advice, Shayne, and called Martine to see how much the book is worth to her. I must say, she was furious, mostly at me but also at you, too. I think she expected you to rough me up and steal the book."

"Then that's what she should have told me to do," Shayne replied. "She just said to get it back."

Vallon continued to smirk. "Dear Martine knows that I have the whip hand in this situation, and she finally came to her senses. She agreed to pay me \$10,000 for it, and you are to deliver the money tonight. I will then hand over the book to you. How does that sound?"

"It's all right with me," Shayne said. "She's paying the freight."

"Indeed. If you gentlemen will leave now . . . I have things to do. I'll see you tonight, Shayne, around ten o'clock?"

"Fine. Thanks for the drink."

Shayne strode quickly out of the house; Alderson hurrying beside him. When they were back in the Buick and headed away from the house, Alderson said, "It looks like you were right, Mike. She wants the volume back badly enough to pay for it."

"And pay highly," Shayne reflected, massaging his earlobe distractedly. He went on a moment later, "I don't think it would be a good idea if you came with me tonight, Colin. Vallon could have a double-cross in mind, and things could get sticky."

Alderson looked disappointed. "I really wanted to see the Tome of Doom — "

"I'll see if I can talk Martine Dufour into letting you have a look at it once I get it back," Shayne said. "I just don't trust Vallon, and I'll feel better handling it myself."

"All right," Alderson sighed. "I appreciate you letting me tag along like you have up to now. Will you call me tonight and let me know what happens at the meeting?"

"Sure," Shayne agreed. He was grateful to Alderson for filling him in on a segment of society that he was almost totally unfamiliar with, and it wouldn't hurt to keep the writer abreast of the events of the case.

It was early evening by the time Shayne had dropped Alderson off at his house and then returned to the office. Lucy had gone for the day, leaving a note that asked him to call her and let her know what was happening with the case. He slipped the note in his pocket to remind him to call Lucy later, and then dug out his notebook and found where he had jotted down Martine Dufour's address and telephone number. He picked up the phone and dialed.

The phone on the other end was picked up on the second ring, and a woman's voice said, "Hello?"

"Ms. Dufour? This is Mike Shayne."

"Mr. Shayne! You — I never intended to pay that scum for the return of my own property! I thought you would do something —"

"Like break Vallon's arms and legs?" Shayne cut in. "That's not the way things like this are handled, at least not by me. I'd like to keep my license. Now, if you want me to refuse to turn over the money to Vallon once I've got the book, then he wouldn't have many options. He couldn't call the cops without admitting to them that he stole the book from you and was trying to sell it back."

Martine Dufour sighed. "No, once I thought it over, I saw the logic in your plan. Go ahead and pay him. It's expensive, but at least there will be no publicity this way. That's worth something."

"Whatever you say. I'll drop by your house about nine and pick up the money, since I'm supposed to meet Vallon at ten. I suppose he wanted cash."

"Yes. He insisted. He said that was the only way to handle a transaction like this."

"He's right. Well, with any luck, you'll have the Tome of Doom back in plenty of time for Hallowe'en, Ms. Dufour."

Her voice was frosty as she answered, "I detect mockery in your tone, Mr. Shayne. You should not be contemptuous of things that you know nothing of. There are powers abroad in the world that you could not even suspect!"

Shayne didn't know whether to take her seriously or not. One thing was for sure: *she* took the whole business seriously. He said, "Maybe so, but I do know a little bit about shakedowns. Is Vallon the type to try a doublecross?"

"The bastard would try anything!" she hissed. "Be careful, Mr. Shayne. Don't lose my money or my book."

"I'll see you at nine," Shayne grunted, then hung up.

Martine Dufour and Peter Vallon may have been lovers once, Shayne mused, but there was nothing between them now but hate. And that was the worst kind of hate, the kind that grew out of love.

IV

SHAYNE WAS CROSSING THE BAY AGAIN that night at nine-thirty, a small briefcase on the seat beside him. There was \$10,000 in the briefcase in small, used bills. Shayne wondered fleetingly where Martine had been able to come up with that amount of cash on such short notice. There must be good money in witchcraft, he reflected.

Martine had been cool and brusque to him when he stopped by her house to pick up the money. She lived in a low, rambling ranch-style house, just north of the city limits, in a neighborhood that was thinly populated, her house being one of only three on that block. Undergrowth threatened to take over the vacant lots around the house.

"Here it is," Martine had said curtly as she handed the briefcase to Shayne. "It shouldn't take you long. I'll expect you back here in an hour or so with the book."

Shayne nodded and said, "I'll be here." He paused to look around at Martine's house. It looked like a normal house on the outside, but on the inside it was very different from the run-of-the-mill suburban home.

The carpet on the floor was a deep blood red, and many of the walls were painted black. Ultraviolet lights made large paintings fluoresce garishly, and the subjects of the paintings were even more gruesome and grotesque than those in Colin Alderson's house. Shayne lost track of the horned demons and spilled blood that he saw in the pictures.

Martine was wearing a silken dressing gown that clung to the curves of her lush figure. Shayne could see why her coven would select her as the high priestess, if the ceremonies were practiced in the nude as Colin Alderson had said.

He was only at the house for a few minutes, just long enough to pick up the money and promise Martine that he would return with the book as soon as possible. Then he headed for Miami Beach and Peter Vallon's house.

A glance at his watch as he drove up to the house told him that he was about ten minutes early. The house was darkened, not a light to be seen in it, and Shayne frowned. Vallon was expecting him, and it seemed strange that there would be no lights on. The thought of a double-cross, a trap, again crossed Shayne's mind.

He cut the engine and slipped out of the Buick, closing the door carefully behind him. Carrying the briefcase full of money in his left hand, he walked cautiously toward the front door of the house.

His finger started toward the doorbell, then stopped before it got there. Instead, he tried the knob gingerly and found it turning easily

in his fingers. He pushed the door open and stepped inside.

There were no sounds in the house that Shayne could hear. He stood stock still just inside the front door, waiting and listening for a long moment. The darkness was nearly impenetrable, as the glow from the streetlights didn't quite reach the house..

Shayne thought about pulling his cigarette lighter from his pocket and using it for illumination, but that would only make him a target if anything was wrong in the house. He remembered from his visit that afternoon that he was facing a hall that led through the main part of the house. He stepped out slowly and carefully, moving down the hall from memory.

Light exploded in his eyes.

Shayne cursed and flung up his free hand, trying to block the flashlight beam that was blinding him. He heard the quick shuffle of footsteps coming toward him, and he knew instinctively that he was under attack.

He swung the briefcase as he heard heavy breathing right in front of him. It thudded into something, and then a fist bounced off Shayne's shoulder. He threw himself to one side, trying to escape the dazzling light.

Arms grappled at him. Shayne threw an elbow at his assailant, felt it hit home, and then he was tearing out of the grip that had almost pinned his arms. He spun around, but the light seemed to follow him, keeping him off-balance. Another fist came out of the glare and smashed into his jaw.

There had to be at least two of them, probably three, Shayne knew. As long as he had only one hand free, he wouldn't stand a chance. He dropped the briefcase and plunged into the melee.

The next few seconds were a wild kaleidoscope of shadows and light and flying fists. Shayne took several good shots to the body, but he gave as good as he got. He heard grunts of pain as he shot punches left and right.

And then he heard someone snap, "Goddammit, get out of the way!" The light flashed toward him, and he jerked his head to one side. The warning had come too late, though, and the heavy flashlight cracked against his head, setting off more fireworks. His hat cushioned part of the blow, but it was still hard enough to send him slipping to his knees.

His hand fell on the briefcase he had dropped a moment earlier, and as he clutched at it and tried to keep from losing consciousness, he heard the same voice commanding, "Let's go! Move!" Heavy footsteps ran away from him.

The front door slammed as Shayne shook his head in the darkness, trying to clear some of the cobwebs from it. He lurched to his feet as he heard the grinding of a car's starter somewhere outside. The front door hadn't stayed shut when it was slammed, but had bounced back open, and he could see it vaguely in the shadows. Shayne headed toward it in a stumbling run.

He reached the door just as a car shot out from beside the house, swerved around his Buick, and headed for the street. Shayne squinted, peering intently after it, and barely made out a license number — THX138. He made a mental note of it, then stood there for a moment and watched the vanishing taillights of the car as he massaged his sore head.

He considered hopping into the Buick and giving chase, but several things stopped him. One was his shaky condition. He wasn't sure he was up to a high-speed chase at the moment, and he couldn't do anybody any good if he wound up wrapped around a telephone pole.

And he wanted very much to find out what the hell had happened here. Where was Peter Vallon? And was the book still here? Shayne had to find out the answers to those questions first, and then he could worry about tracing his mysterious attackers.

The trap, if such it had been, was already sprung, so there was no point in worrying about lights. Shayne flicked his lighter on, used its glow to find a light switch, and snapped the overhead lights on.

The place was a mess. Furniture was overturned and slashed, pictures had been taken off the walls and flung down haphazardly. The drawers of the desk in the study had been emptied, their contents strewn all over the room. The search appeared to have been frantic, but at the same time thorough.

Shayne hurried through the house. It was the same story in each room. Someone, the men who had jumped him in all likelihood, had been desperate to find something. And Shayne thought he knew what that something was.

The Tome of Doom.

Shayne went through the whole house quickly, finding no sign of Vallon or the book. He shifted the briefcase from his left hand to his right and used the left to tug at his earlobe, not gently this time, but rather in anger and frustration.

Alderson had said that Vallon would need a large room for the Black Masses that his coven would hold, but Shayne had seen nothing like that in the house. And there was no basement . . .

Shayne lifted his eyes.

The house appeared to be only one story from the outside, but

Shayne knew that architects could usually manage to hide quite a bit of space if they wanted to. And if he remembered right from the afternoon visit, the roof of the house had been rather high.

He found a pull-down ladder in the closet of the master bedroom.

Grasping the cord that hung from the trap door, he pulled the ladder down, straightening its sections and bracing it against the floor. He looked up through the opening and saw only darkness, but there were decorative candles sitting on the dresser in the bedroom. He lit one of them, left the briefcase on the bed, and re-entered the closet, setting a foot on the bottom rung of the ladder.

He wanted to slip his pistol from its holster under his left arm, but a free hand would be necessary for climbing the ladder. Holding the candle above his head carefully so that the wax wouldn't drip on him, Shayne ascended the ladder.

When he reached the top, he put his head up carefully and looked around. As he had suspected, the attic was much larger than one would have supposed from looking at the outside of the house. The ceiling was high enough that a man could stand up with room to spare anywhere except at the edges. Instead of insulation and wiring, there was a highly polished wooden floor, covered in places with thick throw rugs. The attic was one large room, with enough space for at least a dozen people, probably more. Drapes hung from the ceiling around the edges, most of them in shades of purple. At one end of the big room was a raised platform, and the dais was covered with velvet. Tapestries hung behind it, and woven into the material in intricate patterns were cabalistic signs and seals. Tall, ornate candelabra stood at each end of the dais.

Shayne saw all of this in the flickering glow of the candle he carried, and he knew that this was the temple of Peter Vallon's coven of witches. He could hear in his imagination the chanting of robed and hooded acolytes.

But the thing that caught his eye and held it was the sprawled figure on the platform.

Shayne climbed into the attic room and stalked across it toward the unmoving figure. His lean face was set in grim lines, and his gray eyes were stormy. He stopped in front of the dais and lowered the candle for a better look at the man lying there.

Peter Vallon was on his back, arms and legs stretched out away from him, his fingers curled stiffly. His face was twisted in a grimace, teeth bared in a horrid grin.

The grin was echoed by the slash across his throat, a gaping wound that had gushed out a pool of crimson around Vallon's head.

Shayne said, "Oh, hell," and then he heard the sudden wail of sirens coming closer in the night.

V

VALLON WAS AS DEAD AS HE WAS EVER GOING TO BE, and it took Shayne only a few seconds to determine that the Tome of Doom wasn't in the attic, not unless it was well-hidden. And with the cops on their way, he didn't have time for an intensive search.

Shayne hurried back down the ladder, leaving it where it was. He blew out the candle, wrapped it in his handkerchief, and stuffed it into his pocket. Then he headed for the front door, carrying the briefcase again.

He left the front door open, tossed the case into the back seat of his car, and started the engine. He could see the flashing lights of the approaching police cars now, only a few blocks away. It was possible that they were headed somewhere else, but he doubted it very much. Leaving the headlights off, he pulled out into the street quickly, spinning the wheel at the first intersection he came to and sending the car into a side street.

There were no lights behind him now, and it stayed that way. Shayne took a deep breath as he turned on the headlights. That had been close. Another few minutes and the cops would have found him standing over Vallon's corpse.

Shayne's broad mouth curved in a sadistic grin. The Miami Beach cops had no love for him, and he would have had a hard time explaining what he had been doing there, especially with a dead body and a briefcase full of cash. The Miami Beach Police Chief, Peter Painter, would have loved that.

The first thing to do was put some distance between him and Vallon's house. So far as Shayne knew, there was nothing to tie him to this murder; with any luck, he'd have a little time to try to sort things out.

He lit a cigarette as he drove and considered this unexpected turn of events. He had been warned that he was dealing with people who could be dangerous, but there was nothing mystical about a slashed throat, even if the victim did claim to be a warlock.

The wheels of Shayne's mind clicked over rapidly, constructing a theory of what had happened back at Vallon's house. The men who had jumped him had arrived first, probably seeking the same thing he was after, the Tome of Doom. Vallon would have resisted, and they must have foolishly killed him before they could make him turn over

the book. Then they had to search for it, a search that Shayne had interrupted.

There was no way to know whether the search had been successful or not, though. The men might have taken the ancient book with them, or they might not have found it. For now, it was a question that Shayne couldn't answer.

Nor could he answer the question of who the men were. They had only been shadowy bulks during the fight, and he hadn't recognized the one voice he had heard. He didn't have a clue to their identity, only the supposition that they were after the book.

Shayne crossed Biscayne Bay on the County Causeway and pointed the Buick toward his apartment. He wanted a drink, and then he would start trying to run to earth the men who had attacked him. They might have the book, and it was still his job to find it and recover it for Martine Defour.

Shayne's face became suddenly bleak. There had been no shots fired during the scuffle that would bring the police. Someone had to have tipped off the cops, someone who knew that Vallon was dead and probably someone who knew that Shayne was going to be there.

That description could fit Martine Dufour . . . She could have set him up, using him as the fall guy to get rid of her ex-lover. His fingers tightened on the steering wheel. If that was the case, she would regret roping him in on the plan. She would get no reports from him, and the ten grand would stay with him, until he got this mess sorted out.

Shayne frowned. This case had been bizarre from the start, but beyond the occult trappings, it had seemed like a fairly simple job.

Murder changed all that.

When he reached his Second Avenue apartment across the street from the Miami River, the first thing he did was fill a glass with Martell and take a healthy bite of the smooth liquor. He hung his hat on the rack just inside the door as the cognac warmed him, then sprawled down in his favorite chair with the drink, pulling the telephone toward him. With quick jabbing motions of his blunt fingers, he dialed the number of the Miami office of the Florida Department of Motor Vehicles. The DMV wasn't open for business at this hour, but Shayne knew that someone would be there.

Someone was, and luckily, Shayne knew the man. A few questions and a minute's wait produced the information that Shayne was looking for. THX138 was the license number of a car registered to one Barney Jeffers, with an address on Collins Avenue. Shayne thanked the DMV officer again and hung up.

That was a place to start. While he finished his drink, he called Lucy

to fill her in on what had happened so far. When he finished, there was a second of silence on the other end.

"Then, Michael, you mean that this case has turned into murder?"

"That's right, Angel."

"You're working for a witch, trying to recover a book called the Tome of Doom from a warlock, who winds up with his throat cut in his own witches' temple, where they hold Black Masses. Not only that, but you get beaten up and someone tries to frame you for the killing. Michael . . . why do we get cases like this?"

"Well, Angel, think of it this way — Tim Rourke is going to love it. Think of all the papers he can sell when this case breaks."

He hung up with a tired grin and a promise to keep her up to date, then stood up and stretched. The bump on his head was still tender, but he settled his hat on it anyway and locked the apartment door behind him.

It didn't take long to find the address on Collins Avenue. It was an apartment house, and the mailboxes listed a B. Jeffers in Apartment 203. Shayne slipped his gun from its holster as he climbed the stairs.

Barney Jeffers might not be the man he was after; the license plate could have been stolen or altered. But after being hit on the head once tonight, Shayne was in no mood to take chances. He gripped the pistol tightly in his right hand and rapped on the door with his left.

It swung open abruptly a moment later, and a rough voice said from inside, "Yeah, what the hell is it?"

Shayne had heard that voice before.

He pressed the barrel of his gun against the man's forehead before the guy even knew what was going on and said, "Back up slow. I owe you one, so take it easy and don't try anything."

The man recognized the deadly intensity in Shayne's voice and did exactly as he was told. He backed up into the slightly seedy apartment and said, "H-hey, what gives? I . . . I ain't done anything . . ."

"You were at a house over on the Beach earlier tonight," Shayne said as he heeled the door shut behind him. "You and a couple of others, and you jumped me after you had torn the place apart. Remember now?"

"You're crazy! I never — "

Shayne pressed harder on the gun, cutting him off. "Are you Barney Jeffers?" he asked harshly.

"That's right, but listen, mister, you got the wrong guy."

"I don't think so. You were after the book, weren't you? Did you find it? Or did Vallon hide it too good before you killed him?"

Shayne studied the man as he snapped the questions at him. Jeffers

was a little below medium height, with a broad, rugged face and rapidly-thinning black hair. His shoulders were brawny, and his eyes had a hint of cunning and shrewdness, but little actual intelligence. Shayne had seen the type hundreds of times before — hired muscle. He doubted that Jeffers and the other men had been after the book for themselves. It was more likely that they were working for someone else.

"All right," Jeffers said suddenly, his face losing its look of mock innocence and turning surly, "I recognize you now. You're the guy who came snooping around in the house. We jumped you, okay, but we didn't kill anybody! And you can't prove we did!"

"I don't have to," Shayne growled. "It's up to the cops to do that. All I want is the book."

"I don't know anything about your damn book," Jeffers declared. "Now you better get out of here before I call the cops."

"That I'd like to see," Shayne said.

Jeffers glared. "I will, I tell you." His hand reached out toward a phone on a table. Shayne's eyes followed the movement.

A split second later he was cursing himself for falling for the trick, as Jeffers slipped the gun away from his head and then looped a punch to Shayne's stomach. Shayne grunted and took a step backwards. Jeffers lunged after him.

Shayne's arm whipped around viciously as he backhanded Jeffers across the face with the pistol. The front sight caught, ripping a jagged tear in Jeffer's cheek. The pain and the blood seemed to madden him even more.

Shayne suddenly found his hands full. He blocked most of the punches that Jeffers threw, but a few got through his guard and staggered him. Shayne took a blow on his left shoulder, then jabbed the muzzle of the gun into Jeffer's stomach as hard as he could. The breath went out of the burly man and he started to double over. His chin ran into Shayne's fist and his teeth clicked together. A glaze slid over his eyes.

Barney Jeffers folded up at Shayne's feet, his breath rasping. He tried to get up. Shayne reversed his grip on the gun, rapped the top of Jeffer's head with the butt, and then stepped back as the man stretched full-length on the floor, out cold.

Jeffers would be unconscious for several minutes at least. Shayne holstered his gun and went through the place quickly. No one else was there, but neither was the Tome of Doom, at least not that Shayne could find.

And there was no hint as to who Jeffers and the other men had been

working for. Shayne was convinced that they had a boss who was calling the shots. and he wondered if that boss was Martine. Jeffers was the kind of man who would do almost anything for a price, up to and maybe including murder. As soon as he got a chance, Shayne knew that he would have to check out Jeffers with the Miami PD, find out if the man had a record and who his associates were. There might be time to do that now before Jeffers woke up. Shayne reached for the phone.

It rang before he could pick it up.

Shayne let it ring three time while he thought. Then he picked it up, made his voice harsh and rough, and grunted, "Yeah?"

"Jeffers?" the voice was male, well-timbred, and sounded educated.

Shayne grunted again.

"I've been waiting for you to call," the man on the other end went on. Shayne could hear the anxiety in his tones. "Do you have it?"

"Unh-huh." This was a stroke of luck, Shayne knew, and he had to take advantage of it.

"Then get over here with it right away!"

Shayne lowered his voice more. He was going to have to take a chance. "I, uh, lost the address," he said, hoping the guy would fall for it.

Evidently the man was too agitated to notice any difference between Shayne's voice and Jeffers'. He snapped, "It's the Belmont Towers, remember? The penthouse. I'll tell the doorman to let you up."

"Yeah, be right there," Shayne said, then cradled the phone. He had fooled the man, whoever he was. Now he knew where to find the man who had hired Jeffers and his cronies to get the book from Vallon. Shayne had the feeling that there was a lot about this case he didn't know yet, but now he had a lead, a trail to follow.

He found some strong cord in the kitchen, spent ten minutes lashing Jeffers up so that it would take a knife to cut him free, then left the apartment. He knew where the Belmont Towers, an exclusive condominium highrise, was located, and that was his next destination.

Maybe he would find some answers in the penthouse.

VI

SHAYNE HEADED DOWN BISCAYNE BOULEVARD and was pulling up in front of the Belmont Towers ten minutes later. He left the Buick at the curb and strode confidently up to the doorman who was guarding the entrance to the highrise.

"Penthouse," he said brusquely to the uniformed man. "I'm expected."

"What's the name?"

"Barney Jeffers," Shayne said.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Morrow said to let you go right up." The man swept the large glass door open and stepped back to let Shayne into the luxurious lobby.

He entered one of the elevators and punched the button for the penthouse. The lobby had been deserted at this hour, and Shayne was the only passenger in the elevator. He lit a cigarette as he rode, wondering just who this Morrow was that had hired Jeffers to recover the book. Martine Dufour had mentioned no one by that name, and the man's connection to the whole mess was a mystery, for the moment. Hopefully, it wouldn't be much longer.

When the door of the elevator slid open, Shayne found himself in a small entrance foyer, only a few feet square. There was door on the other side of it, and as Shayne stepped into the foyer, that door opened. The man who opened it frowned at him and said, "You're not Jeffers."

Shayne studied him briefly, seeing a tall man with glasses and gray hair, in an expensive suit. He looked like a prosperous executive, and that was probably what he was, considering his address and the way he dressed.

"Barney sent me," Shayne growled. "Said I was supposed to make a delivery. You're Morrow, aren't you?"

The man still looked perturbed, but he said, "Yes, of course, I'm Morrow. Come in." As he stepped back to let Shayne into the apartment, he went on, "I told Jeffers to handle this personally. Oh, well, I suppose it doesn't matter, as long as you've got what you went after. Where is it?"

Shayne strolled into the penthouse, his hands in his pockets, and looked around at the expensive furnishings. He said, "Quite a place. You look like you can afford it, though. I guess you're talking about the book."

Morrow's face tightened. He said sharply, "I'm not paying you for conversation or speculation. Now hand it over and you can get your money and leave."

"Must be a pretty important book, to get you so worked up. Might be worth a little more than we thought." Shayne let a look of avarice steal onto his face.

Anger made Morrow's face flush slightly. "Jeffers and I agreed on \$500," he snapped. "If you're not satisfied with your cut, you'll have

to take that up with him."

Shayne shook his head. "I don't think so. The price just went up. It's five grand now, not five hundred." When Morrow started to protest, Shayne went on, "I know a lady who'll pay that much, maybe more, for it."

Morrow looked furious. "That — that bitch!" he exclaimed. "So she got to you, did she? I don't know how she found out I hired you, but she won't get away with this!"

Shayne chuckled. "You mean witch, don't you, not bitch?"

"I said what I mean. Now, listen, you, whatever your name is, I want that book. Do you have it with you or not?"

"Not right at the moment. We thought you might get upset like this, and we didn't want to take any chances.

"I can't believe Jeffers would cross me this way." Morrow shook his head. "I'm going to call him and tell him a few things! He won't get away with this, either. You stay right there."

Shayne shrugged. He knew that Morrow would get no answer at Jeffers' apartment, not unless the man was a Houdini at knots. Shayne was going to keep this bluff going as long as possible. Morrow hadn't really revealed anything yet, except a healthy antagonism for a woman Shayne supposed was Martine Dufour.

Morrow had stalked across the room as Shayne stood there in an insolent pose. The gray-haired man snatched up a telephone from a table that looked like an antique and started dialing.

The door from the foyer into the apartment was still open, Morrow having left it that way when Shayne came into the penthouse. So Shayne had a little bit of warning. He saw the elevator door slide open, saw Barney Jeffers and two other men come hurrying out of the car. Shayne ground his cigarette out in an ashtray and squared his shoulders.

"There he is!" Jeffers yelped, pointing a spatulate finger at Shayne. Morrow whirled around at the cry.

"Jeffers!" he said. "I don't know what you're trying to pull, but if you think I'm going to let you and your friends hold me up this way, you're out of your mind!"

Jeffers shook his bullet head. "We ain't trying to hold nobody up," he declared. "It's this bastard here who's causing all the trouble." He looked like he wanted to charge at Shayne like a mad-dened bull and was barely able to restrain himself.

"I don't understand," Morrow said, his confusion showing on his face. "You mean he's not working with you?"

Shayne laughed grittily.

Jeffers was fuming like a volcano. "Of course he's not! I thought earlier that I had seen him before, and now I recognize the guy. He's that damn private peeper, Mike Shayne!"

Morrow turned wide eyes toward Shayne. "A detective! You never even had the book, did you?"

"No," Shayne admitted, "but Jeffers and his friends don't either. Who does, Morrow? Have you got the answer to that one?"

"What are you trying to say?"

"I'm saying that maybe you got your hands on the book someway, and that now you're acting innocent so that you can back out on your part of the deal."

That was clutching at straws, and Shayne knew it, but with the odds as they were, he wanted to keep his opponents as confused as possible.

None of them were having any of it, though. Jeffers said heatedly, "Mr. Morrow wouldn't double-cross us like that, Shayne. You're the one who's trying to screw things up. You might have got away with it, too, if my pals hadn't come by my place after you tied me up." His voice lowered, and his finger strayed to the gash on his face that Shayne's gun had given him. "I got a debt to settle with you, Shayne, soon as you tell what you know about that damn book."

"Not here," Morrow said quickly. "I don't care what you do with him, but I can't have any violence here. My reputation —"

"Your reputation can go to hell," Shayne growled. "It will when the cops hear about how your boys killed Vallon, anyway."

Morrow gasped. The news of Vallon's death was an obvious surprise to him, but Jeffers said, "Goddammit, I told you we didn't kill nobody!" His face was so florid now that he seemed ready to explode, and he suddenly did just that. He yelled, "You bastard!" and leaped at Shayne, his two friends right behind him.

Morrow cried, "No!" but he wasn't going to stop Jeffers, whose anger had finally gotten the best of him. The burly man swung a hard punch at Shayne's red head.

Shayne gave a mental curse himself as he jerked his head to one side and let Jeffers' fist go by, inches from his ear. He had been hoping to find out why Morrow wanted the book of spells, but it looked like he was going to be busy just keeping his skin.

He hooked a short, powerful punch to Jeffers' belly and felt his fist sink into the man's stomach. The other two men, who were broad and brawny like their friend, were reaching for him, and Shayne shoved Jeffers into them.

That slowed them down for a second. Shayne's hand darted toward his gun, but before it could get there, he felt an arm circling his neck

and clamping down. Morrow had acted unexpectedly, driven no doubt by desperation, and he kept Shayne pinned just long enough to let the other two men get by Jeffers.

Shayne drove an elbow back into Morrow's torso, knocking his grip loose immediately, but the damage had been done. A fist clipped his jaw and staggered him, and then the two men were all over him, pounding blows to his head and body while Jeffers caught his breath. Jeffers joined in a moment later, and Shayne found himself backing up, taking two punches for every one he blocked, and on the verge of losing his feet. He knew that if he went down, that would be the end of the battle.

He ducked to let a fist sail over his head. He was fighting defensively, and he knew that way led to ultimate defeat. With odds of three to one, they wouldn't expect a counterattack.

Shayne let loose the reins of his Irish temper then. A roar of rage came from his throat, and he was suddenly throwing himself forward, using his entire body as a weapon as much as his fists. He barreled into the three men and sent them reeling backwards for a moment.

Shayne used every second of the brief respite. He drove a punch into one man's face, then whirled to face another. His leg shot out in a powerful kick, catching a knee with all of his force behind it. There was a sharp, satisfying crack of bone, followed by a cry of agony. That left Jeffers, and as Shayne spun toward him, the man launched an uppercut that seemed destined to end the fight then and there.

Only it missed, as Shayne stopped short, and then Jeffers was suddenly wide open and off-balance. Shayne put everything he had into one last punch.

It slammed into Jeffers' jaw and Shayne felt the impact rippling all the way up his arm. Jeffers' feet came off the floor, and he seemed to hang in mid-air for a moment before he crashed to the floor on his back, knocked out for the second time this night by the big redhead detective.

Morrow and Shayne were the only ones on their feet at the moment. Shayne backed away from the carnage, toward the foyer and the elevator, and he slipped his gun out of its holster as he caught his breath. He leveled the gun at Morrow and said, "All right, I'm getting out of here now, Morrow, and if you've got any sense at all, you won't try to stop me."

"I — I'm going to call the police," Morrow wavered.

"Do that," Shayne grated. "Like I told you, I'd love to see you explain to them about the book."

He saw the defeat wash over Morrow's face, and he went on, "I'm

not through with you yet, Morrow. I'll be seeing you later, and then we'll find out just why you're so interested in the Tome of Doom."

Shayne backed on into the elevator, keeping his gun pointed in the direction of Morrow and his injured and unconscious hirelings. He punched the button for the lobby with his free hand, and not until the door slid shut did he start to breathe easier.

He holstered the gun before he reached the lobby, but he noticed that the doorman gave him a curious glance anyway as he stalked out to his car. There was no telling what Jeffers had said to the man when he arrived.

What mattered now, though, was that he had made it out of what had turned into a lion's den with his hide mostly intact. He didn't know much more than he did before, but he was alive and circulating, and still on the trail.

VII

SHAYNE TURNED THE EVENTS OF THE EVENING over in his mind as he drove away from the Belmont Towers. He had the Buick pointed north, and he kept it in that direction. Martine Dufour was in the clear as far as hiring Barney Jeffers and his friends, but that didn't mean she was innocent in everything else. She could still have had something to do with Vallon's death, and considering the facts of their relationship, Shayne would say that she was a prime suspect.

He had changed his mind about not reporting to her, though. Now that he knew of Morrow's desire to get the book, he wondered what Martine's reaction would be to the news that there was a third party in the game. He knew of a good way to find out.

When he arrived on the street where Martine lived, he found the place not so sparsely populated as it had been earlier. There were over half-a-dozen cars parked around the house, and Shayne frowned as he added his Buick to that number and got out.

There were no lights that he could see in the house. He moved quietly to the front door, then stood there silently for a moment, trying to distinguish if there was any sound coming from inside. He could hear none. The people who had parked all the cars there had to have gone somewhere, though.

Shayne started to knock, then stopped himself and tried the door instead. The knob turned, and he pushed the door open carefully.

There was darkness just inside the door, but he could see the eerie glow of the ultraviolet lights up ahead. He stepped into the house,

closed the door quietly behind him, and walked soundlessly over the thick, crimson carpet.

The demons and monsters in the paintings on the walls seemed to be leering at him, and the eyes of their victims appeared to implore him to help, or at the least, give them quick deaths. Shayne had never been a superstitious man, but now he had to repress a shudder that ran through him.

He could hear a faint noise that seemed to be coming from the rear of the house, and he moved toward it. As he got closer, he realized that it was chanting of some sort, with an intense, driving quality to it that was almost hypnotic.

The hall he was in twisted, and he suddenly found himself before a heavy wooden door. The chanting came from the other side of it, but the sound was so muffled that he knew that the door must be quite thick. The knob was a huge brass thing, molded in the shape of some sort of horned creature.

Shayne was reaching for it when hands came out of the darkness and grabbed his arms.

He tried to jerk away, but the grip was too strong. There was a man on each side of him, and as he struggled, he suddenly felt the cold prick of a knife at his neck. Instantly, he became still.

"Very good," a low voice said behind him. "Stay that way, and perhaps you will yet live a while longer."

Shayne cut his eyes from side to side. The men on each side of him wore dark robes, and hoods concealed their faces. There was a man behind him, the one with the knife, and Shayne felt sure he was garbed the same way. The wielder of the knife prodded him slightly and said in that same low voice, "Shall we go in? That's what you wanted, isn't it?"

The man on Shayne's right opened the door, and Shayne felt himself abruptly propelled through it. He almost lost his balance and went to his knees, but he caught himself just in time.

His eyes narrowed in surprise. The room he found himself in was dimly lit by candles. It was almost an exact duplicate of the attic room at Peter Vallon's house, the room that had become Vallon's death-chamber. There was the same raised platform at one end, the same sort of mystically-inscribed tapestries, the same ornate candelabra. There were a lot more people in this one, though, nearly a dozen men and women, all of them but one kneeling on the floor and chanting, and all of them were nude except for long silken cloaks.

The one person who was not kneeling was Martine Dufour, and she was standing on the platform, her back to Shayne and her arms up-

raised as she led the chanting. Several of the people on the floor noticed Shayne's entrance and broke off their recitation, turning to stare at him in consternation and alarm. Martine noticed the disturbance behind her, halted the chant, and spun around to see what was happening. Her cloak billowed away from her body as she did so, revealing fully the lushness of her figure.

"Shayne!" she exclaimed when her eyes fell on him. "What are you doing here? How dare you interrupt us?"

"We found him just outside the door, Priestess," one of Shayne's robed and hooded captors said. "We know you would want to see the unbeliever who defiles our sacred ceremonies."

"You did well," Martine told him. "Two of you may resume your posts outside, but the other one please stay."

Two of the men slipped out of the door, back into the shadows, but the one with the knife stayed right where he was, his blade at the back of Shayne's neck.

Martine had been shocked by Shayne's sudden appearance, and she had also been caught up in the ceremony she was conducting. Shayne saw the rapid rising and falling of her breasts. She made no attempt to cover her nudity with her cloak, standing haughty and proud on the platform. While the members of the coven watched with wide eyes, Martine said, "You are a foolish man, Mr. Shayne, to come here like this. I expected you long ago. When you didn't arrive on time with the book, I assumed that you had either failed in your mission or had betrayed us." A smile curved her dark red lips, and Shayne saw the flash of her teeth in the candlelight. "You see, we were just calling down a curse upon your head. We can tolerate neither failure or betrayal, whatever the case may be."

Shayne repressed an urge to laugh. The moment of superstitious fear he had felt earlier had passed, and now he felt much more threatened by the knife at his back than by any curse. The sight of the coven members had gone a long way toward dispelling the occult illusion. Martine was the only one who looked the part of a witch. The others in their nakedness looked more foolish than threatening, and some of them appeared to feel pretty foolish.

"What if I told you that I've got the book now?" Shayne said.

"Then hand it over," Martine snapped. "Perhaps we will lift the curse."

"I wish I could. But I only said what if. I don't know where the book is."

Martine's lips curled in a snarl. In a voice full of anger, she said, "Don't toy with me, Shayne. Tell me immediately what happened at

Vallon's house!"

"You mean you don't know already?"

"Of course I don't know! You're trying what little patience I have left."

Shayne inclined his head toward the man with the knife. "Call off your bully boy here first."

"You're in no position to dictate terms."

Shayne sighed. "I was afraid you'd say that."

He spun, dropping his shoulder. The man in the robe lunged at him, thrusting out with the knife, but the only thing it cut was the incense-laden air. Shayne slapped his arm aside and grabbed the robe, pivoting sharply on his heel. Using the muscles in his broad shoulders and back, Shayne flung the man away from him.

The man tangled in a tapestry, then slammed into a wall. The knife fell to the floor as the members of the coven gasped and gaped. As the man bounced off the wall, Shayne stepped in again, sending a hard fist into the cowl and feeling it slam into a nose. The man slumped against the wall again, then slid slowly down it into a sitting position. He held his broken nose and let out a moan.

The coven had surged to its feet at this display of violence, and the looks on their faces were turning ugly. A few of them took steps toward Shayne, but Martine's voice cracked out and stopped them.

"Quite impressive," she sneered, "but I can summon all the help I need, Shayne. Or I can just turn my followers loose on you. They don't like people who scoff at our way of life."

She had the coven eating out of her hand, that was for sure. They were buying all the hokey trappings, and Shayne knew that any mob can be dangerous, even a mob of naked, would-be witches and warlocks. He said quietly, "I just said I don't know where the book is. I didn't say I couldn't find it and get it back for you."

"Then tell me quickly what happened tonight, before I unleash the forces at my command on you."

"Answer a couple of questions for me first. Where were you about ten o'clock, and who's Morrow?"

Martine's smooth, high brow wrinkled in a frown. "I don't understand. What have those questions to do with your mission?"

"It was about ten o'clock, just before I got there, that Vallon was killed. His throat was slashed."

Even in the dim candlelight, Shayne could see the shock that washed over Martine's face. Either that was the first she had heard of it, or she was a damn good actress. The latter possibility seemed just as likely to Shayne as the first.

"And Morrow," Shayne went on, "is the guy who hired three thugs to take the book back from Vallon. What I want to know is Morrow's connection to you and why he's so interested in the Tome of Doom?"

"I know no one named Morrow," Martine declared emphatically, "but if he wishes to possess the Tome of Doom, then he is a thief like Vallon!"

"Not exactly like him," Shayne said dryly. "He was alive the last time I saw him."

The members of the coven were still stirring and muttering among themselves. Martine took a deep breath and said, "This Morrow . . . His men must have killed Vallon and taken the book."

"They don't have the book, but they're still after it hot and heavy. And they claim they didn't kill Vallon."

"But who else could have?"

"You," Shayne said flatly. "Either alone or with some of your friends here."

There was an angry murmur from the coven, but again Martine cut them off. "That is ridiculous! If I had the book, why would we have been cursing you for failing to get it?"

"I don't know," Shayne admitted. "But I don't know why Morrow wants it, either. I just know he does. Somebody's lying, *Priestess*, and I intend to find out who."

"And when you do?" Martine breathed.

"Then they're going to be goddamn sorry they ever met me," Shayne said bleakly. If everybody else in this case could make melodramatic threats, so could he.

On that note, he spun and headed for the door, wondering if they would try to stop him or not, halfway hoping they would. They didn't. Martine called out, "Let him go! But don't think you can cross me, Shayne. I intend to have that book back, and I will, I swear by all the Dark Gods!"

VIII

THE CHANTING STARTED UP AGAIN as Shayne left the room, and he still expected that some one would try to stop him. No one did, however, but he could feel eyes watching him as he stalked out of the house and got back into his car.

He headed toward his apartment, rubbing his rough-hewn jaw with a hand. Over the years he had spent as a private detective, he had run across some strange cases, but this had to be one of the most bizarre. He was used to dealing with blackmail, kidnapping, extortion . . .

Even murder, though still always shocking, was something he had learned to cope with. But witches and warlocks, curses and spells, these things were new to him, and he wasn't sure how to proceed.

He wondered what the Miami Beach cops had made of it when they found Vallon's murdered body in the makeshift temple. The outrageous circumstances had probably caused some hair-pulling tonight over in Painter's town.

Shayne was sure that either Martine Dufour or the man called Morrow was responsible for Vallon's murder. As he had told Martine, someone was lying to him. Martine certainly had plenty of motive and, for all he knew, the opportunity as well. She had never answered his question about her alibi for earlier in the evening.

Morrow, on the other hand, had no motive that Shayne could see as yet, but he was a long way from finished with his investigation of the man in the penthouse. Morrow had an interest in the book, that was for sure, and his hiring of Jeffers and the others was ample proof of that. It could be that he was a warlock, too, although Shayne didn't really believe that.

He tugged at his ear as he tried to make sense of the whole thing, then glanced at his watch. It was well after midnight now, and a weariness was settling over his body. Shayne knew that there was little or nothing he could do until morning, so he drove directly to his apartment.

After garaging the car in the basement, Shayne rode the elevator up to the second floor. He got his key out as he walked down the hall, and as he inserted it in the lock and turned, the phone started to ring inside.

It might be Lucy, so he hurried in and picked the receiver up.
"Hello?"

"Mr. Shayne?" It was a man's voice, and it took Shayne a second to realize that it belonged to Colin Alderson.

"Yeah," he grunted. "This is Shayne."

"This is Colin Alderson, Mike. I hope you don't mind me calling this late, but I was extremely curious about what happened at your meeting with Vallon. Did you get the Tome of Doom back for your client?"

"Afraid not," Shayne grunted. "There was a lot of trouble. Vallon was dead when I got there."

"Dead? Who killed him?"

"I wish I knew," Shayne said. "I've had two or three run-ins with people who seemed to think I did." He sketched in the outline of the last few hours for Alderson.

When he was finished, the writer said worriedly, "I think I should warn you, Mike, that you may be in extreme danger. If Martine Du-four's coven thinks you might be withholding the book from them, they might decide to take desperate measures against you."

"They can call down all the curses they want," Shayne said.

"I'm not just talking about that. Most of the followers of Wicca are very firm in their beliefs, and they're not fond of unbelievers. They might not hesitate to back up their curses with physical violence."

"I'll have to take my chances, then. Besides, I want to keep things stirred up. That's a good way to force information to the surface."

Alderson took a deep breath. "There's one thing you may not have considered. If someone tried to frame you for Vallon's murder, they might go to the members of Vallon's new coven and tell them that you were responsible for their High Priest's death. I promise you, that's a situation that could become deadly in a hurry."

Shayne hadn't thought about that angle of it. He said, "Like I said, I'll just have to watch out. Whoever set me up is going to be disappointed that the frame didn't work, and he or she isn't going to like it if I keep poking around. All I've got to do is keep the pressure on and wait for the other side to slip up."

"Then be careful. You can never tell what these people will do. I've researched the occult for years, and there's always something new and sinister popping up."

Shayne assured Alderson that he would keep his eyes open and then said good night to the writer. There were still a few things he had to do before he could catch a little sleep.

It was too late to call Lucy, and that could wait until the morning, when he would see her at the office. He fixed himself a drink, savoring the cognac and chasing it with ice water, then lit a cigarette as he strolled into the bedroom.

The briefcase with the ten thousand dollars in it was where he had left it, on the top shelf in his closet, pushed to the back. After checking it, he stripped his clothes off and stood under the shower for several minutes, alternating hot and cold water. He came out feeling refreshed, towed off briskly, then lay down on the bed to stare at the ceiling, smoke moodily, and think. None of the rudimentary theories he came up with answered all the questions.

Shayne didn't think he would be able to sleep well, but after he stubbed the cigarette out and turned off the light, he dozed quickly. Several hours passed as he slept soundly, but then the dreams started.

Shayne didn't dream often, but these were vivid. They were full of monsters and demons, and they were gathered around a small, red-

headed figure, tormenting it with great glee. After a while, different torturers appeared, and foremost among them was the huge, lovely but somehow distorted Martine, still nude and towering over the object of her scorn. Morrow was there, too, with Jeffers and the other two men, and someone else was laughing, great booming peals of laughter full of derision, but whoever it was couldn't be seen.

His brow covered with sweat, Shayne tossed and turned in his bed as the dreams went on, until with a sudden, half-choked cry, he sat up in bed and woke up.

Taking a deep breath, Shayne wiped the perspiration off his face and told himself to cut it out. He hadn't had nightmares for years, and there was no reason to start now.

And abruptly, sitting in the darkened apartment in the middle of the night, Shayne knew that there was something very simple, very down-to-earth behind all of it, that the occult trappings were just that, a facade with nothing of substance behind them. He grinned sheepishly at himself, lay back down, and dropped off again into a dreamless sleep.

This time it went on until the screaming started.

Shayne bolted up out of bed as the shrieks resounded from the hall outside his apartment, grabbing a shirt and a pair of pants and dragging them on hurriedly as he went through the living room to the front door. He saw through the windows of the apartment that it was early morning, seven o'clock, perhaps.

The screaming was coming from just outside the door. He jerked it open, growled, "What the hell?" and saw one of his neighbors, a middle-aged woman who lived down the hall, cowering against the wall. She pointed a shaking finger at his door.

Shayne turned to look, and his foot slipped in the small puddle of fresh blood on the floor. He said softly, "Damn . . ."

Pinned to his door with a large thorn, and pierced by twelve more smaller thorns, was a heart.

IX

TEN MINUTES LATER, Shayne had the dripping heart sitting on a piece of newspaper in the middle of his kitchen table. He had a cup of strong black coffee, with a healthy dollop of brandy in it, in front of him. He sipped from it occasionally as he glared at the grisly item on the table.

It was an animal heart of some kind, he could tell that much, and it was certainly gruesome enough. That poor woman from down the hall

was going to have the shakes for a while, after confronting a sight like that on her way to work. It had taken Shayne some quick talking to keep her from going into hysterics right there in the hall.

There had to be a reason for its being placed on his door, but Shayne was damned if he could see what it was. Carrying his coffee mug with him, he went into the living room and picked up the phone. A glance at his notebook gave him Colin Alderson's number, and despite the fairly early hour, he dialed it.

When the writer answered, Shayne said, "Mike Shayne here, Colin. I hope I didn't wake you up."

"Not at all," Alderson replied. "I'm an early riser; I've already been out and run five miles, in fact. Now, what can I do for you?"

"I think I need your help to understand something that just happened over here. I found what looks like a warning on my door."

"What sort of warning?"

"A heart."

There was the momentary silence of surprise on the other end, then Alderson said, "A heart?"

"That's right. It looks like it's from some sort of animal; I'm pretty sure it's not a human heart."

"Does it have thorns in it, thirteen of them in all?"

"Yeah," Shayne grunted. "How did you know?"

"It's a sheep's heart," Alderson told him, "and each thorn represents a member of a coven. It is a warning, Mike, a sign that you've been marked for death."

Shayne snorted. "I've already been cursed by Martine's coven, and this little jewel probably came from Vallon's bunch, out for revenge like you suggested. What next, I wonder?"

"Don't underestimate the seriousness of this, Mike," Alderson said. "You could be in great danger. A threat like that is often for show, but it can be in deadly earnest."

"Then the sooner I get that book in my hands, the better off I'll be," Shayne declared. "I can't afford to slack up now."

"Well, keep me informed. I'd still like to get a look at the Tome of Doom, when you do find it."

"I'll let you know if anything comes up," Shayne promised. "I appreciate all the information you've given me. This witch business is unfamiliar territory to me; I probably would have gotten lost without your help."

"I'm just glad I could help."

Shayne said goodbye and then hung up. He finished his brandy-laced coffee and carried the cup back to the kitchen, pausing to shake

his head grimly at the bloody warning on the table. Then he crossed to the bedroom, finished dressing, and got ready to leave the apartment.

He wrapped the heart up in the newspaper and carried it downstairs with him. Judging by the looks he got in the lobby, the story of the heart pinned to his door had made the rounds of the building. He took it out through the rear door and put it in the dumpster in the alley.

By the time he got to his office, it was nearly nine o'clock. Shayne thought for a moment that he might have beaten Lucy to the office, for a change, but when he opened the door, he saw her sitting at her desk. He said, "Hello, Angel," and started to step into the room.

That's when he saw the tight, scared expression on her face.

Shayne threw the brakes on, but it was too late. The door slammed shut behind him, and as he started to whirl around, something crashed into the back of his head. His hat flew off, and he took an involuntary step forward before going to one knee.

He tried to surge back to his feet, but someone hit him again, this time in the small of the back. Pain shot through Shayne, blurring his vision and sending him slumping to the floor. As he fell, though, he could see well enough to recognize the man called Morrow, standing to one side with a gun in his hand.

Shayne rolled onto his side and saw Barney Jeffers looming over him, a grin of savage anticipation on his bruised face. He said, "Our turn now, Shayne. You're gonna take it and like it!"

His foot lashed out and thudded into Shayne's side. Morrow snapped, "That's enough, Barney! We don't want him injured. At least, not yet."

Shayne forced himself into a sitting position. He could see the way Morrow's gun was pointing negligently in Lucy's direction. That meant that he would have to behave himself, at least for the moment. He growled. "What the hell do you two bastards want?"

"I want that book, Shayne," Morrow said calmly. "I did a lot of thinking after your little visit last night, and I came to the conclusion: you've got the book, and you've had it all along. I wouldn't be surprised if you killed Vallon, took the book, and then came back later trying to divert suspicion from yourself."

"You're crazy," Shayne said. "I've never even seen the blasted book."

"I don't believe you. I think you're holding out, trying to jack the price up with a bidding war between Martine Dufour and myself. It won't work, though, because we have you and your secretary in our hands now."

"Dammit — " Shayne started to deny having the book again, but Morrow cut him off."

"Don't worry, Mr. Shayne," he said. "I don't intend to cheat you out of your profit. I can afford to pay you for the book. It's just that if you want to keep this lovely young lady safe, you'll accept my offer without question, and not Martine Dufour's."

"So what's the offer?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

Ten grand seemed to be the going price for the book. Peter Vallon had asked that for it, and Martine had been prepared to pay it.

Shayne looked up at the gray-haired man and said, "Just who the hell are you, Morrow, and why is that book so important to you? You're no warlock, I'd bet on that."

"Of course I'm not," Morrow snapped aggrievedly. "And you know very well why the book is important to me. I'm sure you've looked at it." He cast a glance at Lucy and looked vaguely embarrassed.

"All right, ten grand it is," Shayne said suddenly. "But you'll have to wait for the book. I'm not stupid enough to carry it on me."

"I imagine you've got it in a safe place," Morrow said. "I hope you do. If someone else gets their hands on it, I've got no reason to keep you alive, Shayne."

"I know that. And you'll get the book, all right. I pick the time and place, though."

Barney Jeffers backhanded Shayne across the face and snarled, "You ain't in no position to bargain, shamus."

Shayne glanced up at Jeffers, tasted blood at the corner of his mouth, and said, "I've got the book, haven't I? I'd say that puts me in a damn good position."

"Take it easy, both of you," Morrow said. "When can you deliver the book to me, Shayne?"

"Tonight," Shayne said without hesitating. "Ten o'clock. At Martine Dufour's house."

"What?" Morrow exclaimed. "I can't go there. I won't go there!"

"You'll have to if you want the book," Shayne glowered. "I told you, I decide when and where. Martine Dufour is my client, or at least she was, and I think she's got the right to know why I won't be able to do the job she hired me to do."

"You just want to give her an opportunity to outbid me!" Morrow said heatedly.

Shayne shook his head. "You've got my word that I won't give the book to Martine."

"All right, it appears that you've got the upper hand right now,"

Morrow allowed curtly. He reached out and clamped a hand down on Lucy's arm. "But the young lady goes with us now. Her life should make a good insurance policy, don't you think?"

Lucy let out a little cry as Morrow jerked her to her feet, and this time Shayne came to his feet, ignoring the threatening attitude displayed by Jeffers.

"Take it easy," Shayne said. "You don't need to do that. I'll keep my word."

"The young lady will make sure of that." Morrow's gun came up and lodged against Lucy's side. "Stand back, Shayne. We're leaving now. We'll see you tonight."

"Lucy . . ." Shayne said.

She took a deep breath and said, "I'll be all right, Michael. Don't worry about me."

"She'll be well taken care of, Shayne," Morrow assured him. "No harm of any kind will come to her . . . if you keep your end of the bargain."

"I'll be there," Shayne said grimly.

The three of them backed out of the office, Lucy pale and frightened, Morrow grim-faced, and Jeffers smirking at Shayne's predicament. The big redhead detective stared at the office door for several long seconds after it had closed behind them.

Then he whipped to the window and watched as the trio came out onto the sidewalk a few moments later. Morrow had put the gun up, but he still had a hand on Lucy's arm, and Jeffers was right behind them. The three of them got into a car parked at the curb, Morrow and Lucy into the back seat and Jeffers behind the wheel, and it pulled out into the morning traffic on Flagler Street. Shayne's keen gray eyes squinted as he read the license plate. He watched the car until it turned a corner and went out of sight.

"Goddammit!" Shayne rumbled. He had never expected events to take this turn. Now Lucy's life was at stake . . .

And he had no idea where the blasted Tome of Doom was.

Taking a deep breath, Shayne told himself to relax. He had to calm the turmoil that was raging inside him, if he was going to be able to concentrate and do anything about this mess. He had twelve hours, twelve hours in which to come up with the elusive book.

Of course, there was no guarantee that once Morrow had the book, he wouldn't try to kill them both anyway. But if Shayne couldn't find the book — that way led to sure disaster.

He sat down wearily in the chair behind Lucy's desk and began to tug on his earlobe. His eyes fell on the desk calendar, and he saw that

Lucy had already torn off the leaf for the day before. The day's date stared up at him and seemed to mock him.

October 31st.

Hallowe'en.

X

ANOTHER CALL TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES turned up the information that the license plate he had just noted belonged to Theodore Morrow. The address matched that of the Belmont Towers, but now that Shayne was sure of the man's identity, that still didn't tell him much. He put in a call to the City Room of the Miami *Daily News* and managed to catch Tim Rourke at his desk.

"How's the witches and hobgoblins, Mike?" the reporter asked.

Shayne suppressed the urge to curse. "Don't ask," he said. "I'm still on the same case, and I need some help."

"Sure. What's it about?"

"I need a make on a Theodore Morrow. He seems to be well-to-do, lives in the Belmont Towers. Think you can come up with something on him?"

"I'll give it a try," Rourke promised. "I've got a few minutes free; I'll run downstairs to the morgue. How about giving me a little more of the lowdown, though?"

"I'm working against a deadline right now, Tim, there's not time. Get back to me as quick as you can on Morrow, all right? I'm at the office."

"Will do."

Shayne hung up, lit a cigarette, and glared at the walls. He was trying to put the pieces of this puzzle together in a way that made a complete picture, but so far, something seemed to be missing . . . Or maybe not missing, just overlooked. Shayne's craggy red brows drew down and his forehead corrugated in a fierce frown.

Morrow didn't have the book, or he never would have pulled a stunt like this. That meant that Martine probably had it, since no one else knew that Vallon had been in possession of it before his death —

Shayne breathed a curse, a curse on himself for not seeing things clearly before. He sat up sharply, as his mind seized on an answer, an overlooked piece of the puzzle that made all the others fit once it was in place.

He still had a look of intense concentration on his face when the telephone rang. Snatching it up, he barked, "Yeah?"

"I turned up Morrow for you, Mike," Tim Rourke said. "He's well-

to-do, all right. He owns that blamed highrise he lives in, plus a lot of other property around here. He's also your typical pillar of the community, member of the Chamber of Commerce, former County Commissioner, etc. Now, you can tell me how a guy like this ties in with a bunch of crazy witches and warlocks."

"I wish I could," Shayne grunted. "I've got an idea, but I'm not sure yet. I think it's time to find out, though."

"Mike — " Rourke said hurriedly before Shayne could hang up. "When you get a chance, let me know what's happening, okay? The paper's readers seem to like hearing about these fracases of yours."

"Sure, Tim," Shayne said. "It should all break sometime tonight, and I'll call when I can."

He hung up, scooped his hat off the floor where it had fallen earlier when Jeffers slugged him, and headed out of the office, his long legs carrying him along in a hurry.

The twenty minute drive seemed to take a lot longer. Any time a case started to break, the slightest delay irritated Shayne, and with Lucy's life on the line, that only increased the tension of the situation.

Finally, Shayne pulled up on a broad, tree-lined street, in front of a large, three-story house. He hurried up the walk and onto the wide front porch, rapped on the door facing sharply. A moment went by, and then Colin Alderson opened the front door and said, "Hello, Mike. I really didn't expect to see you so soon. Has something else happened?"

"Yeah, it has," Shayne grated. "I finally figured out a few things. Can I come in?"

"Of course." Alderson stepped back to let Shayne into the arcaneously-decorated house. "I was just doing the polish draft of a chapter in my new book, but it's nothing that can't wait."

"What's this new book about?" Shayne asked. "Murder?"

Alderson had been leading Shayne down the hall toward his study, but at Shayne's words, he stopped and looked quizzically over his shoulder. "I'm not sure I understand," he said. "It's about the occult, like all of my books."

"Must be about the Tome of Doom, then," Shayne said. "Let's go on in and get comfortable, and I'll explain what I mean."

"Of course," Alderson agreed, but he still looked confused.

Alderson sat down behind his desk, on which an electric typewriter was purring. Shayne walked over to one of the walls covered with books, turned back to face Alderson, and jammed his hands in his pockets.

"Now what's this about my new book and murder and the Tome of

Doom?" Alderson asked.

"I thought maybe you were going to write about how you killed Peter Vallon and took the Tome of Doom from him," Shayne said flatly.

Alderson's jaw dropped. "What? What the devil are you talking about, Mike?"

"What the devil is about right. Where's the book, Alderson? I figure you've got it hidden in her somewhere. A library like this would be a good place to hide a book."

Alderson shook his head. "You've got it all wrong, Mike. I don't have the Tome, and I certainly didn't kill anyone."

"Then who killed Vallon?" Shayne asked, his voice suddenly savage. "You knew he had the book, you were there with me when we set up the meeting last night. You wanted that volume of crazy spells so bad that it was written all over you, but I didn't think anything of it at the time, because you were being so helpful and friendly to me. You were probably already planning to come back early, knock off Vallon and get the book, and set me up for the killing!"

Alderson looked aghast. "How can you accuse me of that? I've tried to help you at every turn!"

"And in the process, you've kept up with everything I've done and all my suspicions. Cut the act, Alderson. Morrow's men might have killed Vallon for the book but he was already dead and it was gone before they got here. I'm sure of that now. Just like I'm sure you pinned that heart to my door this morning, trying to spook me into maybe giving up the case."

Alderson placed his hands on the desk and stood up slowly. "I think you'd better leave, Mr. Shayne," he said. "I had thought we were going to be friends, but it doesn't look like it now."

Shayne shook his head. "I'm not going anywhere without that book."

Writer and detective exchanged a long, silent stare, then Alderson abruptly heaved a long sigh and said, "All right. It's on the shelf, right behind you."

Shayne half-turned and scanned the titles on the shelf behind him. Alderson went on, "To your right," and then as Shayne put his hand on an ancient-looking, leatherbound book, "Not that one. Three more over."

Shayne took the book indicated off the shelf. It matched the description Martine Dufour had given him perfectly, right down to the lock holding it shut. The lock had been tampered with, though, and now the book could be opened. Shayne started to do so, saying "Now we'll see what all the fuss was over — "

Alderson leaped at him.

Shayne's back was still mostly turned, but he sensed the rush as much as he heard it. He spun around, saw Alderson holding a ceremonial dagger snatched from the wall display, and dodged frantically. He brought the book around in front of him.

The dagger slammed into it.

The sharp-pointed blade penetrated the cover of the old book and lodged in the pages. Shayne wrenched the book to the side, tearing the dagger out of Alderson's hands. He dropped the Tome to the floor long enough to block the ineffectual punches that Alderson was throwing at him, then swung a long, looping blow of his own that crashed into Alderson's jaw. The writer went reeling backwards, crashed into his desk, and then fell in a heap on the floor. He shook his head, trying to catch his breath, while Shayne picked up the book and stalked over to him.

Shayne slipped his pistol from its holster and kept it trained on Alderson while he flipped the book open with his other hand. The gun was only a precaution, since all the fight was gone from Alderson now.

Flipping through the pages of the volume, Shayne studied the pictures briefly and let out a surprised whistle. "Nothing magical or mystical about this," he said. "It's just high class pornography."

"No, it's not," Alderson said weakly, sitting up. "Those pictures were taken at authentic Black Masses, in which new members of the coven are . . . initiated, you could say. The practice of witchcraft has a high degree of sexuality to it."

"I'll say," Shayne grunted. "The book's a fake, then. There's really no Tome of Doom."

"Oh, the Tome really exists, but that isn't one of the copies." Alderson laughed bitterly. "I thought it was. I certainly never would have killed Vallon for that collection of filth, if I had known."

"Morrow would be willing to kill for it, though, since he's in here." Shayne had recognized the gray-haired man in several of the photographs. "Something tells me there's more to Martine's coven than just witchcraft."

He had all the pieces now, and he could see that it was a sweet set-up. Martine and Vallon had been running a blackmail ring, that much was obvious, using pictures that must have been taken secretly at their so-called Black Masses. It was no wonder that Vallon had taken the book with him after their falling-out, and no wonder that Martine had been willing to pay dearly to get it back. If most of the participants in the pictures had been upstanding citizens like Morrow, it would be

worth a fortune in hush money.

Alderson looked up at him from the floor. "What are you going to do now? Call the police?"

"That's the first thing. Then I've got some getting ready to do."

"Getting ready?"

Shayne's lips quirked in a grin, but the expression didn't reach his eyes. They stayed cold and hard.

"Tonight's Hallowe'en," he said. "Time for tricks or treats."

XI

NINE-THIRTY THAT NIGHT found Shayne outside Martine Dufour's house, walking up to the door boldly and ringing the bell.

He had passed several groups of organized trick-or-treaters on his way to Martine's, but most of the children were already back in their houses with their sugar-coated loot. Shayne had to smile at the gaudily costumed youngsters, especially the little girls in long black dresses and tall black hats. A snatch of an old song, dimly recalled from childhood, flitted through his mind.

Witches and goblins and ghosties, and things that go bump in the night...

He put those thoughts out of his mind, though, when he saw the door of Martine's house opening slowly before him. He could see no one inside, but someone had to have opened the door. A low, throaty voice said, "Come in, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne stepped inside, keeping his hands in plain sight in case anyone was watching him. No use tempting itchy trigger fingers. The door slammed shut behind him, and then he saw Martine. She had been waiting on the other side of it, and now she smiled at him. "Welcome to a celebration of the Old Ways," she said. "The ceremony will be starting soon. You'll join us, of course."

"Yeah," Shayne said. "I wouldn't miss it. So you're just going to carry on without the Tome of Doom?"

Martine stepped closer to him. She wore a long black dress, similar to the costumes that Shayne had seen earlier on the kids, but this one plunged open almost to the waist, affording ample proof that Martine was no child. She sidled up next to him, laid her slim, long-nailed fingers lightly on his chest, and said, "No. You will return our book to us in time for the Sabbat." Her face was only inches from his now. "I know you will."

Shayne brought his mouth down on hers, tasting the warm, moist eagerness of her as her arms slid around him and locked at his back.

"What if I tell you I still don't have it?" he said softly as he broke the kiss.

"I'd call you a goddamn liar," Martine whispered, then cried out, "Take him!"

Shayne had expected that. He saw the figures leaping at him out of the shadows and shoved Martine away from him. She got in the way of two of the attackers and slowed them down, and Shayne swung to meet the rush of two more. He blocked a punch, shot one of his own to a head dimly seen, and then felt a fist thump into his sternum. While he tried to shake that off, one of the others who had gotten around Martine by this time slipped an arm around his neck and started squeezing. Shayne spun and lurched against a wall, trying to dislodge the man's grip.

He ran instead into a flurry of blows to his stomach. Still turning, he avoided a punch aimed at his head, hooked a left of his own to a robed attacker, and tried to keep his balance. All four of the attackers wore the robes and hoods as they had on the previous night, and Shayne's feet kept tangling in the flowing robes. Suddenly, almost before he knew what was happening, he was falling.

What felt like all four of them landed on top of him. His breath puffed out of his lungs, and the room spun around him. There were too many fists coming at him at the same time, and he couldn't block all of them.

It was only a matter of time, and it really didn't take all that long.

A few minutes later, he was being dragged, groggy and dazed, into the large room that served as the witches' temple. All the coven members appeared to be there. They were wearing the robes now, as well, with the cowls thrown back. The robes would come off when the Black Mass began, Shayne knew. He hoped things didn't go that far.

There was an addition to the room tonight, a narrow table that stood on the platform. It was covered with red velvet draperies that shone in the candlelight. The burly robed guards carried Shayne to this table and dropped him roughly on it.

Martine appeared beside him, a long, curved knife in her hand, and she put the razor-sharp blade to Shayne's throat. He kept as still as possible, both to keep her from cutting him and to recover some of the strength that the fight had taken out of him.

"All right, Shayne," she hissed as the guards stepped back. They dropped their robes, as did the other members of the coven, while Martine leaned over Shayne and spoke in a low voice, "You must give me the book, if you wish to save your life. It is no longer a matter of money. *I must have the book!*"

Shayne swallowed carefully. "Of course it's a matter of money," he said, his tones matching hers. The coven members had begun a low, murmuring chant, and Shayne spoke so quietly that his voice was audible only to Martine. "You've got to have the book back so that you can continue the blackmail. You've really got these suckers fooled, don't you?"

Martine's teeth bared in a grimace, and the pressure on the knife increased slightly.

Shayne went on anyway. "You must go through a coven pretty quick, get them all worked up with this mumbo-jumbo, then snap your pretty pictures and move on to the next batch of marks. Shakedowns pay a lot better than sorcery, don't they?"

"Keep talking, Shayne, and you'll force me to kill you!"

"But not until you get the book, right? Hell, I don't know how you get people to fall for this crap. I guess they'll go along with anything, no matter how stupid, if there's some fooling around involved with it."

"Shut up!" Martine hissed. "Do you want them to hear you?"

"That sounds like a damn good idea to me." Shayne smiled up at her. "What are you going to do, cut my throat? Then you'll never find out where the book is."

Martine took a deep breath, clearly at a loss as to how to proceed. If she killed Shayne, she would have to give up the book with its valuable photos. If he talked much more, he would ruin her set-up with this coven . . .

"Do not mock the ways and the followers of Wicca overmuch, Shayne. I was a believer myself once — "

"Before you and Vallon cooked up your scheme, I'll bet. And I'd also bet that he wanted a bigger slice of the pie, and that's what caused the split — " Shayne broke off, then said harshly, "Well, what's it going to be, *Priestess*, do you let me up, or were you planning on a human sacrifice tonight?"

Martine never got a chance to answer the question.

"Michael!"

Lucy Hamilton had just stepped inside the room, followed by Morrow and Jeffers, both of whom were carrying guns. Martine jerked in surprise, and Shayne felt the knife leave his throat.

He slapped her arm aside and surged up off the table. Martine slashed at him. He didn't hesitate to think about the ethics of hitting a lady . . . or a witch.

His fist cracked into her jaw and sent her down and out.

The coven let out a roar of outrage and started for him. Morrow yelled, "No, wait!" When the naked disciples of Wicca ignored him,

he fired into the air over their heads.

That put a stop to it.

Morrow said, "All right, get over there with your boss," and shoved Lucy toward Shayne. She made her way through the mob quickly to Shayne's side. Morrow and Jeffers kept their guns trained on the coven. Jeffers looked a little shocked by their nudity.

"Okay, Shayne, we're here just like you said," Morrow bit off. "Now hand over the book."

Shayne slipped an arm around Lucy and squeezed her reassuringly. "I believe there was something said about ten grand?"

Morrow smiled thinly. "That part of the deal has been cancelled. The price is now your safe conduct out of here. If you give me any trouble, I'll just turn these people loose on you."

"You'll never get the book that way."

A few more minutes was all Shayne wanted. He had noticed something that Morrow hadn't. There were eleven members of the coven in the room, and Martine was the twelfth.

That meant that there was one more person somewhere in the house. And Shayne had just spotted a moving patch of shadow behind Morrow and Jeffers.

The figure suddenly leaped out of the shadows and grabbed Morrow. The man let out a yell and triggered off a wild shot.

As if that was a signal, bedlam broke loose.

Morrow and Jeffers began firing erratically, but they were outnumbered, and it was only a matter of seconds before the guns had been knocked from their hands. The coven members had them fast, nudity seeming to be of little deterrent in fighting. Several of the women members stooped to their discarded robes and came out with small, wicked-looking knives.

On the dais, Lucy clutched Shayne's arm and said, "Michael, we've got to do something!"

"And get carved up ourselves?" Shayne asked grimly. Lucy averted her eyes as the coven closed in around Morrow and Jeffers. The two men started to scream . . .

"Goddamn it, everybody freeze!"

The number of milling figures in the room suddenly increased as uniformed police officers swarmed into the room. Robes were wrapped around the coven members, and handcuffs clicked shut on the wrists of the badly-shaken Morrow and Jeffers. The burly figure of the man who had shouted through the crowd and stepped up on the platform beside Shayne.

"All right, Mike," Miami Chief of Police Will Gentry said tiredly.

"That is all of them, isn't it? We waited outside until it looked like everybody had gotten in, like you said."

Shayne grinned hugely. "Yeah, Will, that's all of them." He pointed at Morrow and Jeffers. "You can get those two over there for kidnapping. Lucy will testify that they held her against her will. Not to mention that they assaulted me last night and this morning."

He jabbed a knobby finger at Martine, who was just regaining consciousness, and said, "Her you can book for blackmail. The proof is in the book I turned over to you earlier. She was ready to stick a knife in me, too. And you already know the scoop on Alderson killing Vallon. So I'd say that wraps it up, all right."

Gentry waved a hand at the coven members. "What about these spooks?"

Shayne grimaced. "There's no law against being gullible. You might have a strong talk with them, though, about the fact that they were ready to carve Morrow and Jeffers into little pieces."

Gentry and his men began to herd the crowd out of the temple room, leaving Shayne on the platform with his arm around Lucy. She looked up at him and said, "I'm lost, Michael. I think you're going to have to explain all of this to me. Did you say that Alderson killed Vallon?"

"That's right, Angel. I found that out earlier, but I wanted to clean up this racket of Martine's, too, not to mention nail Morrow and Jeffers for what they pulled." He glanced at his watch. "It's not midnight yet . . . not the witching hour, as they say . . . so it's still Hallowe'en. What say we go back to your place? I'll fill you in on all of it, and then . . . maybe a little trick-or-treat?"

"Treat," Lucy smiled.

NEXT MONTH

Mike Shayne returns in

ALL THE FACES OF FEAR
by Brett Halliday

Don't miss it!

The biggest crime of all is war. If you don't believe it, read this terrifying short-short to its inevitable and terrifying conclusion!

THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF MANKIND AFTER WORLD WAR III

By Chester H. Carli

Something came hurtling through the window and landed on the floor. It was small and wrapped in a dirty gray cloth. One of the men unwrapped it. It was a freshly-severed finger!

TOUGH

By John Lutz

METZGER WATCHED THROUGH HIS OLD ARMY BINOCULARS as the car veered from the main highway that was barely visible as a distant, faint ribbon on the colored surface of the desert. A lazy plume of dust rose and hung in the air like a signal, telling Metzger that the car was on the old fork road, heading his way.

A lean, sun-browned man somewhere between fifty and seventy years of age, Metzger put down his binoculars, rubbed his gray and gritty beard and frowned. He lived alone, and he spent a lot of his time here at the window, watching the highway. His shack was one of fifteen deserted and dilapidated clapboard structures that were the remnants of a hippies commune of the mid-Sixties. Metzger had lived nearby then, near a rise on the other side of the highway, and when the last of the commune people had left, he moved into the best of the shacks and the one with the clearest view of the faraway highway that was his one link with his fellow man.

He again raised his binoculars to his pale blue eyes. The car was only a few miles away now. Judging by the size and density of the dust cloud it raised, it was a big car.

THE THREE MEN IN THE GRAY LINCOLN SEDAN WERE COOL despite the desert's ninety-eight-degree temperature. The car's powerful airconditioner on high was more than a match for the late afternoon sun. All three men wore dark expensive suits and were neatly groomed. The two in the front seat were in their late thirties. The third man, Eddie Hastings, a dark-haired classically-handsome man with white, even teeth and a curiously jaunty demeanor, was in his twenties. But Eddie considered himself tough enough for this company or for any company. He had held up his end of the job back in Vegas, which was one reason they were driving now with over half a million dollars of stolen casino money in the trunk. It was Vito Dellano, the car's driver, who had shot the man giving chase in the casino's parking lot. And Eddie knew that the man had posed no real threat. Big Vito had shot him because he felt mean at the moment. Plenty of reason for Vito.

The other man in the front seat provided a study in opposites. He was short while Vito Dellano was tall; fair while Vito was dark; blond and curly-haired while Vito was black-haired and approaching baldness. His name was Art Grogan. He had been an enforcer and body-guard in the eastern mob for the last ten years. He had met Eddie Hastings during a brief stint in prison over a year ago, and the plan was born.

Vito provided the in they needed at the casino, and early this morning they had made the biggest score of their criminal careers, a dream score.

Now they needed to lie low for a while, divide the holdup proceeds, and then anonymously begin new lives. They had developed car trouble, a leaking oil line, a few miles back, and when they'd spotted the distant cluster of shacks from a rise in the highway they decided to conceal the car and themselves there and wait out the inevitable man-hunt. Vito remembered the place from years ago. They were sharp, mean and Big City all the way. No one would expect them to hole up in a remote and crude desert ruin.

METZGER SAW THE THREE MEN AND FELT A SUDDEN DREAD. They had spotted his run-down Jeep and parked near it. He could hear them talking.

"You think this pile of junk runs?" the hulking dark one said.

"The point is," a dapper, good-looking youngster answered, "it belongs to someone. It ain't been here forever like the rest of this

wreckage. See how you can still make out its tire tracks in the sand?"

Then all three men gazed through shimmering desert air toward the nearest of the canted clapboard shacks, toward Metzger's home. The men glanced at one another, and then they spread out as if on a military maneuver and advanced on the shack.

Metzger quickly gathered up his boots, knife and a canteen of water and made for the back door.

But when he opened the door the blond man was standing outside smiling at him. The blond man was holding a revolver.

"It ain't hospitable to run out on your guests," he said, motioning with the gun for Metzger to go back inside. Metzger obeyed and the blond man followed.

"Were you goin' somewhere?" Eddie asked in an amused voice. "An important appointment, maybe?"

"So's we under stand each other right off," Vito said, and stepped over and backhanded Metzger viciously across the face.

Metzger, backing away in a flurry of scrawny brown limbs, almost fell down. He raised a hand and felt blood on his lean cheekbone.

"Nice place you got here," Grogan said with a chuckle. He patted an errant lock of blond hair into place with his free hand and glanced around. "We're gonna be staying here for a while, old man. That is, if you invite us."

Metzger stood silently, staring at the bare wood floor. He had a radio in the shack. They would notice it soon, know that he might have heard about the casino robbery on the news. Three well-dressed men in a big car. Who else could they be? And they had killed a casino employee.

Vito stepped near enough to hit Metzger again if he so chose.

"Stay as long as you like," Metzger muttered, still staring at the floor.

"Very neighborly," Eddie remarked. He walked around, opened doors. "Hey, looka here, a freezer. Not big, but there's meat in it."

"No TV, though," Grogan said. "But look if it ain't a radio."

"You listen to the radio much, old man?" Vito asked.

Metzger shrugged bony shoulders.

"He knows," Grogan said. He absently twisted the large diamond ring he liked to flash. The ring was on the trigger finger of the hand holding the revolver: "Not that it makes any difference."

"How often you go into town for supplies?" Eddie asked Metzger.

"Every few months." The voice was a quaking whisper.

"How the hell do you live on just that?"

"I hunt."

Vito smiled. "Check around for a rifle, Eddie."

Eddie found the gun almost immediately, a modified old Enfield army rifle. "An antique," he said. "Like its owner."

"It looks to me like it'd fire," Grogan said. "That's what counts." He frowned and looked around at the bare walls, the glassless windows and the sink that supported a bucket of greenish well water. "How long do you figure we'll — "

Something suddenly rammed into Grogan. It was Vito. Grogan caught a glimpse of a fleeting shadow, tried to raise the gun in his hand. His wrist struck Vito's arm and the shot hammered harmlessly into the wood floor. Eddie, who was standing on the other side of the room, stared slack-mouthed at the window through which the old man had disappeared. It was almost as if the bearded desert creature had been an illusion. He'd been here; he was gone. Like that.

Vito cursed angrily. Then he smiled. He laughed. "He was laying back on us, the old bastard! He wasn't half so scared as he pretended. He was just waitin' his chance."

"He was quick when it come," Eddie said. "So quick I hardly seen him make it out the window."

"He's an old sand rabbit," Vito said, still grinning. "What do you expect? But there ain't no place he can go. Let's spread out and search all these shacks."

Guns at the ready, the three men from Las Vegas, sweating now and in shirt sleeves, began a systematic search of the ramshackle ruins.

METZGER WAS UNDER THE FLOOR OF THE SHACK near the center of the old commune, in the dug-out space where once drugs had been hidden. He knew they would search for him, and before long they came. He lay perfectly still and listened to the cautious hollow footsteps overhead, saw the indistinguishable shape through the cracks in the floor boards. Then the searcher, satisfied that the shack was empty, moved on.

Metzger laughed soundlessly. He had caught them off guard, pretended that he was scared nearly numb. But he had sized up the three men almost immediately. Tough. City tough. But Metzger hadn't survived Korea, then all these years alone in the desert by being soft.

"I DON'T GET IT," EDDIE SAID, forearming perspiration from his face. "He ain't in any of the shacks, so where did he go?"

Vito licked cracked lips and swiveled his head to take in the spread of weathered, leaning shacks. "Oh, he's still here somewhere."

"He ain't armed," Grogan said wearily. "He can't harm us none, and he ain't goin' to — " He suddenly raised a hand to his chin. "The Jeep!"

"Relax," Vito said through his wide grin. He held up a ring of keys. "I took these before we started lookin' for the old coot. And I took the distributor caps as well from both the Jeep and the Lincoln. He ain't goin' nowhere. Which gives me an idea."

The three men returned to Metzger's shack, and Vito explained that he would take Metzger's Jeep and drive to the crest of a distant rise. He had noticed a pair of binoculars in the shack, and on top of the rise he would be able to sit and use them to scan the array of run down structures until he saw some sign of the old man. He would note the location carefully, drive back to join the others, and then they would deal with their unexpectedly elusive quarry.

Vito took the binoculars, a canteen full of the brackish well water, and after making the ancient army surplus Jeep serviceable he set off in the midst of rattles, exhaust fumes and dust toward the distant rise of sand that shimmered in dancing heat waves. Eddie and Grogan hurried back into the dim comparative coolness of the shack's interior.

Less than an hour had passed when something came hurtling through the window and landed with a thump on the floor near Eddie. He yelled and jumped, unconsciously drawing his automatic from its shoulder holster. But the object on the floor was only something small and wrapped in a dirty gray rag.

Grogan came over to stand by Eddie, and both men stared down at the lump of cloth. Then Eddie felt a sudden anger at himself for letting the crazy old coot startle him. He knelt and carefully unwrapped the cloth.

"It's just a rock," Grogan said, watching studiously.

"Yeah," Eddie replied. Then he straightened violently. "Holy Mother!"

Grogan was staring wide-eyed at him, puzzled. "What is it?" And then he saw.

"*It's a finger . . .*" Eddie said. "*It's somebody's cut-off finger.*"

Both men knelt and stared at the small putty-colored member on the dirty cloth. It appeared to be a man's little finger. Grogan had seen something like it before when Larry Collissimo had been blown up in his car in St. Louis.

"A note," Eddie said, and he unfolded the slip of paper that had been in the cloth-wrapped package with the rock and bloodless finger.

"He's got Vito," he said in a flat voice after reading the scrawled note. "He says come now — just one of us — to the shack farthest

west and trade him his freedom for Vito, or he'll give us the rest of Vito as dead as Vito's little finger."

Grogan was pale even for Grogan. His shirt was plastered to his short, muscular torso. He grinned a predator's grin. "He'll want all of our weapons and our car keys," he said. "And who knows what else? You know, you almost gotta admire the old bastard."

"Remember he's got Vito's gun now," Eddie said. "And the Jeep. Why do you figure he just didn't up and run?"

"How far would he get in that rattly old Jeep with us after him?" Grogan said. "Or maybe he ain't got enough gas to get anywhere. Anyway, we'll go see him."

"He said just one of us," Eddie cautioned.

"Just one of us will go to the front of the shack," Grogan said. "You'll be coming up from the other direction."

"What about Vito?"

"We'll save him if we can."

Both men stared at each other, both thinking about half a million dollars split two ways instead of three. They checked their weapons and left the shack.

As he doubled around to approach the rear of the shack where the old man waited, Eddie glanced at the ridge Vito had started out for. He could see nothing but blazing, lowering sun. All around him the desert was starkly shadowed and eerily desolate, wavering in the heat, with deep purples and reds cast over its undulating surface. Eddie spat, mustered his determination and cautiously moved forward.

"Old man!" Grogan called, when he was within fifty feet of the shack's half-hinged front door.

There was no answer. Grogan hefted his revolver and continued toward the shack.

A snap, a whir, a cloud of sand at Grogan's feet.

At first he thought he'd been bitten by a rattlesnake. Then he stared with amazement at the knife protruding from his chest. The old man had rigged some kind of spring trap, concealed it beneath the sand. There was supple length of wire tied to the knife's handle and attached to something on the ground.

Breathing hoarsly, fighting the pain, Grogan fastened his fingers about the knife and slowly removed it. As it slid free, he screamed. He took three steps, whimpered and fell.

Eddie heard Grogan scream. Crouched low, he ran toward the front of the shack. In the distorting purple shadows, he almost fell over Grogan.

He glanced toward the shack. "Damn him!" he moaned. He did

have enough sense to grab Grogan's revolver before running for cover.

Eddie had enough of the old man. The thing to do now was to get in the Lincoln, leaky oil line or not, and get as far away as possible.

As he reached the old man's shack, Eddie stopped and stood still, panting, feeling spasms of confusion and fear. The Jeep was parked alongside the Lincoln.

The shack's door opened and Vito stepped out onto the plank porch. He glowered at Eddie. "Where the hell is Grogan?" he asked.

Eddie trudged forward, a gun in each hand, his shoulders slumped. "Grogan's dead," he said. He stared at Vito's hands.

METZGER SAT LEANING AGAINST THE ROUGH WALL and expertly adjusted the bandage about the stump of the severed little finger of his left hand. He was grinning through his pain, his teeth crooked and yellow in his sun-darkened face. He had bagged one. If he could have grabbed the fallen one's gun, he'd have gotten two of the intruders. But the young one had been too quick for Metzger this time.

Metzger heard the Jeep drive away, watched it disappear in the direction of the ridge. He knew what their plan was, so he devised one of his own. Easy enough to stay out of sight. And a little finger was fair trade for his life. His idea had been worth a try and partially successful.

Sweat streamed down Metzger's lean face into his matted beard, but he didn't mind the heat. He had been frostbitten at the Chosin Reservoir in Korea. After living through that fiercest of battles and retreats, he had vowed never to be cold, hungry and afraid again. So after his discharge he had come to the desert and never once had he minded the heat or desolation. He knew how to get by in the inhospitable desert. He had learned how years ago from a uranium prospector who had befriended him.

"THE OLD CODGER'S TOUGHER THAN WE THOUGHT," Vito said, after Eddie explained what had happened. Vito had been driving back from the ridge when the confrontation took place.

"I say we climb in the car and get out," Eddie said.

"And leave the old bastard alive? There ain't that many turnoffs in this part of the country. No place to hide. If the cops come by here and talk to him, we'll be caught in a few hours. First we take care of the old man, then we leave."

"What'd you see from the ridge?" Eddie asked.

"Nothin'. He's stayin' holed up." Vito's dark brows lowered. "I

did run into somethin' odd, though. A junkyard of old cars half buried in the sand. Must be dozens of 'em."

"Spare parts!" Eddie said. "Maybe we can fix the oil line!"

"I got a better suggestion," Vito said. "We siphon the gas outa the Lincoln, put it in the Jeep and take that. When we leave, the old man won't be in any condition to report it stolen."

Eddie silently chewed on the inside of his cheek. The old man. The rickety desert rat who couldn't weigh more than a hundred and forty pounds. He was proving to be a surprisingly difficult obstacle to overcome. And Eddie knew that Vito was right. In order for them to get away clean, the old man had to die. Eddie looked out the nearest window and saw that the desert was almost dark. Stars seemed to be staring down from the night sky like the eyes of animals. "Any ideas?" he asked Vito.

"One'll come," Vito assured him. "Here's the situation. We can't leave the old man, and he can't leave because he's got no transportation. That highway might be visible, but it's almost fifteen hard miles away — too far for an old heart-attack risk like that to walk to in the desert either by day or night."

"So it's a stand off," Eddie said.

Vito turned on a lamp fashioned from an old glass jug. "Not to my way of thinking," he said. "We've got food and water here. The old man might be able to find water, but not food."

Just then the light flickered and went out, and Vito and Eddie heard the freezer motor waver then gurgle to silence.

"Wait here!" Vito commanded. He went outside, got a flashlight from the glove compartment of the Lincoln and shone it about the exterior of the shack until he found the electrical hookup. Then he followed the lines away from the shack, playing the flashlight beam along the ground in front of him. He didn't want to die the way Eddie said Grogan had died.

Eddie waited nervously for almost fifteen minutes before hearing footsteps on the front porch. He was backed into a corner, his gun drawn, when the door opened and the faint moonlight revealed the unmistakable bulk of Vito.

"He's busted up the generator for keeps," Vito said.

"Then we're even up with the old man," Eddie said. "That meat in the freezer will spoil in no time. We gotta leave."

Vito stood scowling, occasionally wiping sweat from his thick brows. He knew Eddie was right, but he didn't like admitting that a whiskery old man had outsmarted them. And if they were going to leave, it might as well be as soon as possible and under cover of darkness.

"You keep an eye out for the old coyote," Vito said. "I'll siphon the gas for the Jeep and transfer the money."

Eddie nodded, wondering if the old man had recovered his knife from Grogan's dead hand. He didn't like this a bit, not in the dark.

But Eddie had no reason to worry about nighttime sentry duty. Vito returned and told him that the tires on both the Jeep and the Lincoln had been slashed. Now hunter and prey were equally immobile. And there was something else about the slashed tires that sent a shiver of doubt and stifled terror through Eddie.

The old man didn't want them to leave. He had gone on the offensive.

EDDIE COOKED SOME PARTLY SPOILED GROUND BEEF that first night and again for breakfast. But by the second afternoon the rest of the meat in the now-hot freezer smelled strongly and was unfit to eat. At least Eddie and Vito were one day up on the old man. He hadn't eaten since yesterday morning.

The electric pump that drew water from the well was useless now, so they rationed the water in the bucket on the sink. There was plenty of it. But water proved a poor substitute for food. Eddie hadn't been hungry since his boyhood in Brooklyn, and he'd never been this hungry.

Through the fourth day Vito and Eddie did little but slump in opposite corners of the shack and endure the hunger and heat. They no longer tried even to talk. Eddie was sure that the old man must be dead by now, but he was too weak to care. They could only hope that someone would see the distant dots of the shacks from the rise in the highway, as Vito had, and make the mistake of driving over to investigate.

By late afternoon Eddie wondered if he might be hallucinating. He decided that he was only drifting in and out of sleep because of his weakened condition. But he dreamed, and the dreams were so real. Like this one. He could swear that the old man was standing before him, stacking all the weapons on a table. And Vito was sitting up in a chair, tied to it with thick rope. And Eddie was sitting up also. He suddenly knew that he wasn't dreaming at all. The old man was grinning down at him.

Eddie fought against the ropes that held him. Even at his strongest he wouldn't have been able to budge. He squinted at the old man and saw that he seemed to be none the worse for his ordeal. In fact, he appeared more well fed and healthy than when they had first seen him.

"The old bastard tricked us," Vito said weakly but with venom.

The gray-bearded man in front of Eddie smiled acknowledgement for the compliment. Grogan's diamond ring glinted on his scrawny middle finger. The stub of the little finger of the same hand was still neatly wrapped.

"What'd you eat," Eddie asked, "cactus?"

"That's where I got my water," the old man said. "I et meat."

"But where? . . ." A coldness suddenly spiraled through Eddie. He realized where the old man had gotten meat. He understood now, too, about the "junkyard" Vito had seen. He knew how the old man survived way out here alone in the vast, cruel desert.

"You get them from the highway, don't you?" Eddie asked.

"Ever once in a great while," the old man said. "Often as I need."

Vito squirmed helplessly in his chair. "What the hell are you two talkin' about?"

"Look at him," Eddie said, "and think about that junkyard of cars you saw. Think about Grogan."

"I still don't get it."

"He's a cannibal," Eddie said, hardly believing his own words; his own terrible but inevitable conclusion. "He killed Grogan and lived off his body while we were starving."

Vito stared at the old man with horror, then he began to laugh crazily, the whites of his eyes glittering.

When he was finished laughing, he looked at Eddie and actually winked. He was Big Vito again. "Don't let it get to you, kid. Our string's run out, that's all. When you're dead you're dead, and it don't matter what happens to the meat."

Eddie suddenly fixed wide eyes on the useless freezer and then on the old man. Something had occurred to him. "If Grogan was dead," he said, "how did you keep him from. . . ."

"That was a problem I learned how to handle some years back," the old man said. He looked at Eddie and waited.

"Oh, dear God!" Eddie croaked.

"Your friend Grogan had passed out and lost a mite of blood, that's all," the old man said.

Eddie's face was contorted, his mouth open as if he were screaming, but the scream was soundless.

Vito stared at him, still not understanding. But he would understand.

"Now we'll see how tough you really are," the old man said. And he untied Vito's left arm.

MIKE SHAMUS

by FRED FREDERICKS



The nude body of a woman hung by its neck from the light fixture, and an overturned chair lay within kicking distance of a daintily pedicured foot. Suicide? Detective Lieutenant Cathy Carruthers thought not. Murder, more likely.

A Matter Of Observation

By Mel D. Ames

DETECTIVE LIEUTENANT CATHY CARRUTHERS surveyed the death scene with a calm and calculating eye.

In or out of uniform, Cathy Carruthers was unmistakeably all woman, with the size and bearing of an Amazon, six feet (with heels), and blonde. And as she paced the hotel room in silent deliberation, she did things to an austere grey suit that had never been intended by the designer.

This morning, at the Hotel Westmore, Room 804 harbored a grim pantomime of death. The nude body of a woman hung by its neck from the light fixture, and an overturned chair lay within kicking distance of a daintily pedicured foot. There was an eerie attitude to the body; to the limbs, mostly, as they stood out a little from the perpendicular, as though death had come suddenly in the throes of panic. The weight of the body on the thin leather belt that held it had pulled the light fixture partly away from the ceiling and a few pieces of plaster were strewn on the dark pile of the carpet; some fragments, between the rungs of the overturned chair and beneath the body, were scrunched deeply into the rug fibres. The usual tiresome trappings, peculiar to all second-rate hotels, were positioned about the room: bed, dresser, night table, a mate to the fallen chair and a television set. The rapid flip-flop of the TV screen gave a weird, psychedelic effect to the scene, heightened again by the vibrant sounds of a string

orchestra on the FM band.

"Suicide?"

Detective Sergeant Mark Swanson regarded his superior with manly deference. The questioning tone in his voice had not been unintentional, though the fact seemed self evident. Bitter experience had taught him to accept the obvious with caution.

"Shall I cut her down, Lieutenant?"

"Do that, Mark." Her smile was butter on his daily bread. "Use the same chair."

Swanson set the chair upright beside the hanging woman. The pointed toes hung about an inch below the level of the seat. "With that kind of clearance," he said, "she'd have had to stand on tip-toe. A bit of a stretch, but certainly not impossible."

Lieutenant Carruthers winced with womanly qualm as her assistant mounted the chair, sinking his policeman's feet deep into the well-upholstered cushion — with typical masculine indifference, she thought — then centered her attention on the dead woman, as he parted the thin leather belt that held her, and lowered her gently to the floor.

She had been pretty, once, about mid-twenties, with short dark hair and a good figure. Now, her face was a purple horror. Lieutenant Carruthers knelt beside the body and drew a few strands of dark, tightly-curled hair from one clenched fist.

"Could be her own," observed Swanson, over her shoulder. The Lieutenant turned contemplative eyes upon him that temporarily took his mind off his work. This was one of the compensations.

"Take a sheet from the bed and cover her," she said demurely, slipping the hair samples into a small white envelope, then into her jacket pocket.

A little man with black hair and swarthy features came into the room. "My name's Forbes," he said, "I'm the hotel manager." He levelled his words at Mark Swanson who, busy with the sheet, directed him with a nod of the head to his imposing colleague.

"Thank you for coming," said the Lieutenant pleasantly. "I should like to ask you a few questions."

The little man turned his head from one to the other, unable to decide where his obeisance lay. Cathy Carruthers had long since resigned herself to this hesitancy on the part of some men in accepting her, a woman, in what they considered a man's domain. But precious few hesitated for long.

"What was the woman's name?" she asked with practiced authority.

"Valeri Smith," replied the hotel man.

"Miss?"

"Yes. At least, that is how she registered."

"And when might that have been?"

"Yesterday evening, about seven." Forbes squirmed nervously.

"Have you ever seen her before, Mr. Forbes?"

"No . . . well, I mean . . . this wasn't her first time to stay at the hotel. Yes, I've seen her, before."

"But you were not acquainted with her?"

"No."

"Do you know anybody who was?"

"No, I don't."

The Lieutenant gave him a searching look. "Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?"

"No . . . except that I can't see what you're making such a fuss about. The creature obviously took her own life."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, for one thing, we had to break our way in this morning. Both doors to this room were bolted from the inside . . . and the transom. The window is almost a hundred feet off the ground — no ledges or balconies. I'm no detective, Mam, but that adds up to suicide in any man's language."

"Yes, Mr. Forbes, I agree," Lieutenant Carruthers said sweetly, "you are *not* a detective. Because, you see, it is quite obvious to me that this woman was murdered."

Mark Swanson cast an enquiring glance at his superior. He knew from past experience that this was no idle premise.

"Now, perhaps you can tell me, Mr. Forbes, who was the first to find her?"

Forbes was visibly disconcerted. "One of the maids, I believe, a Mrs. Grebski."

"Is she in the hotel now?"

"Uh . . . yes." Forbes raised his eyes in an attitude of reflection. "Shall I send her in?"

"Please do. And, Mr. Forbes, before you go . . ."

Lieutenant Carruthers was standing by the door to the hall and she drew the hotel man's attention to the light switch on the wall. It was the type with two flat surfaces, that you push rather than flick, and on the lower OFF surface was a fingerprint so clearly visible that it seemed almost to have been put there intentionally.

"You will notice," the Lieutenant told him, "that someone has left their calling card. That is, if you can remember with certainty whether

or not anyone else has used this switch."

"Yes," Forbes said quickly, "I do . . . I mean, it was me. The light was on, so I turned it off. Force of habit, I guess."

"That was this morning when you found the girl?"

"Yes."

"Thank you, Mr. Forbes."

AS THE HOTEL MAN LEFT, LIEUTENANT CARRUTHERS answered her assistant's unspoken query with an audacious wink, then with one blood-red fingernail, she pushed the 'ON' surface of the switch and looked up at the broken fixture. The bulb did not respond.

"What do you make of that?" she said.

"Must be a short in the fixture," offered Mark.

"Must be," agreed the Amazon, absently.

Mark withdrew the bulb from its socket and tried it in the lamp on the night-table. This time, it lit up.

"Success," he said, but as he turned, he found himself to be alone with his conclusions, however illuminating. The Lieutenant was already deeply engrossed in a new line of contemplation.

"Let us consider the dilemma of the doors," she mused aloud.

There were two; one door opened out into the hall, the other to an adjoining room. The hall door, she noticed, had a night latch and the customary hotel night-chain, which now hung broken and useless from the doorjamb. The other door, which connected to room 806, had a common slide bolt with a projecting knob that fell, as it was moved forward, into a notched locking slot. There was also a locking slot at the other end of the bolt housing, which engaged the knob when the bolt was in the open position. The Lieutenant tested the easy action of the bolt, then withdrew it and tried the door. It was apparently locked from the other side.

Mark Swanson, close at her elbow, had been running parallel with her observations until she stooped to retrieve a toothpick from the floor carpet, and here he lost contact in a sudden flash of Amazonian leg.

"Interesting," mused the Lieutenant, toothpick held twixt thumb and forefinger.

"Very," said Mark.

When she straightened, Forbes was standing in the hall doorway. He ushered in a middle-aged nondescript sort of a woman, in a blue thin-striped uniform.

"This is Mrs. Grebski, Lieutenant. She was the one who found her."

"Thank you, Mr. Forbes." The Lieutenant turned compelling eyes upon her assistant. "Mark, while I'm talking to Mrs. Grebski, would

you endeavor to open this connecting door from the other side. Perhaps Mr. Forbes would assist you. I should like to have a look at that other room."

The medical examiner took that precise moment to arrive, followed closely by photographers and lab-men. The Lieutenant guided Mrs. Grebski to a spot by the window, out of the ensuing chaos.

"Mrs. Grebski, do you remember what time it was when you found her?"

"Mrs. Grebski had the look of a frightened child."

"Yes, sir . . . ah — Ma'm, 'bout quarter to eight, I'd say."

"What made you investigate so early?"

"804 had an early call, Mam, I thought the room'd be empty."

"I see. Now, tell me what happened."

"I knocked first, Ma'm, then used my pass key. The door wouldn't open but a few inches because of the night-chain. But I could still see inside." She shuddered. "It was horrible."

"What did you do then?"

"I screamed, she said, looking as though she intended to again. "Then I went for Mr. Forbes."

"And Mr. Forbes broke the door in," the Lieutenant filled in for her, "saw that she was long dead, and called us."

"That's right, Ma'm."

"Mrs. Grebski, did you follow Mr. Forbes into the room?"

"No, Ma'm not likely."

"Did anyone?"

"Uh . . . no, Ma'm."

"You're sure of that?"

"Yes, Ma'm."

"Thank you, Mrs. Grebski, you may go."

As the maid stepped gingerly around the luckless Miss Smith, on her way to the door, the medical examiner looked up to see the top half of Lieutenant Cathy Carruthers disappearing out the open window. She was prevented from disappearing entirely only by the tender balance of the remaining half — which he regarded with unprofessional interest — as it maneuvered her safely through an examination of the window's exterior, and an exquisite re-entry.

"Intriguing," she mused, regaining her lofty stature with a toss of her blond head.

"Very," said the M.D., averting his eyes.

"Examiner." She favored him with a disarming smile. "You've something to tell me?"

"Nothing you don't already know."

"Strangulation?"

"Yes."

"Can you pin the time down?"

"You want an educated guess?"

"In the absence of anything better, yes."

"I'd say . . . six to eight hours."

"Mmm . . . Was the neck broken?"

"I think not."

"That was something I didn't know, Examiner. Thank you."

Mark Swanson came through the connecting door just as Valeri Smith was being borne horizontally out the other. He found the Lieutenant inspecting the contents of the dead woman's overnight case. The bag looked as though it had been rifled.

"Have these things been disturbed?" asked the Lieutenant.

"Not prior to your arrival," Mr. Forbes volunteered from the doorway.

"And these?" She indicated some clothing that hung in a doorless alcove, serving as a clothes closet: a gaily patterned dress, a slip, and a three-quarter coat. The coat was beltless, but the leather trim on the collar matched the belt that had circled the pretty neck of Valeri Smith.

The hotel man shook his head. "Not to my knowledge," he said.

"Mr. Forbes," the Lieutenant favored him with a long look, "I wonder if you would get me the name of the person, if any, who occupied room 806 last night."

"I already have that information, Lieutenant," said Mark Swanson. "It was a Mr. Wilson Greaves, sales representative from out of town, in plastics, or so the register says; fiftyish, hundred and fifty pounds, five-foot-six and bald as a billiard ball. Booked in at about 11 P.M. last night and left with the night owl."

"What time did the night owl leave?"

"The night clerk saw a man answering Greaves' description leave the hotel just after midnight, about 12:15. And, incidentally, both rooms were arranged-for a day ahead, simultaneously, by someone who identified herself as Mr. Greaves' secretary."

"Thank you, Mark." She projected a just reward. "Now let's have a look at this other room."

In the open doorway, the Lieutenant stopped to trace a barely distinguishable line with her fingertips; across the varnished surface of the doorjamb. There was an identical mark on the now accessible edge of the open door. By closing the door, she was able to bring the lines together. Both marks were at the same approximate height as the bolt in 804.

"Has this room been cleaned yet, Mr. Forbes?"

"Not yet."

The bed showed no signs of having been slept in and there was no luggage, or clothing, or any sign of occupancy. A door key, stamped 806, was on the bureau.

"And the door to the hall, Mr. Forbes. Was it locked when you came through, just now?"

"Yes, It was. I used my pass key."

"Good. Mark, see if you can't find traces of burning in that metal waste basket. I'll check the bathroom."

Under the lip of the toilet bowl, the Lieutenant found several irregular pieces of ash residue. She was slipping them into a white envelope when Mark came in holding up a blackened hand.

"Somebody's burned something in there," he said, "but how did you know?"

"I didn't," she smiled, "but I do now."

She continued to poke around the room until a seascape above the bed caught her eye. It was slightly askew, and she straightened it. A half inch strip immediately below the picture was noticeably lighter than the surrounding wall.

"Mark," said Lieutenant Carruthers, without a smile, "I want you to put an all-points on Mr. Wilson Greaves. I'm afraid we shall have to detain that gentleman for questioning." She stopped on her way out the door, and turned, and as though on second thought, she added: "And Mr. Forbes, we shall want you as well."

"Me? . . . Want me?" Forbes was livid. "For what?"

The Lieutenant spoke softly, with a forced calm.

"The part you have played in this affair, Mr. Forbes, poses no mystery for me. Your bungling, obvious attempts to hide one crime has implicated you in another. I am in doubt at this point only as to *why*."

Mark's look of amazement was paralleled by the show of utter disbelief on the face of the hotel manager. He wondered if he would ever have enough answers of his own to withstand the initial impact of these oracular bombshells. But when the dust had settled, there were only questions, still. Before he could put voice to them, the Amazon was fast disappearing down the hall.

LIEUTENANT CARRUTHERS SAT ATOP HER DESK in the squad room, adorning her fingernails with a fresh coating of blood-red lacquer. Behind his own desk, Mark Swanson had propped his feet on an open drawer and was regarding his attractive colleague with mild chagrin.

"Okay," he said, "give — "

The Lieutenant smiled, sphinx-like. "A simple matter of observation," she said lightly. She crossed one majestic leg over the other, contributing nothing to local jurisprudence.

"Out-maneuvered again," muttered Mark.

"To begin with," began the Lieutenant, "let's examine the unlikely premise that Valeri Smith committed suicide. Frankly, Mark, I thought it inconceivable that any woman (and a vain one, in particular — did you notice those pedicured toes?) would deliberately suffer the indignity of being found stark naked and, at the same time, so horribly visaged. Dead, yes; dead and naked, perhaps; repugnantly dead and/or naked, *no*. There was just no point in it. I thought it more likely she had worn a nightie, or a slip of some sort, that it was perhaps torn during a struggle, and subsequently removed from the scene as not in keeping with the suicide idea."

"Mmm," said Mark.

"Then, again, it appeared to me most inconsistent, that a person, sufficiently disturbed as to contemplate the act of suicide, would switch on the television for a little viewing beforehand. I'm more inclined to think that the television was used to cover the sounds of struggle, and whoever did her in simply neglected to turn off the set."

"Logical," said Mark, "but hardly conclusive. Surely you had more to go on than that when you told Forbes we had a murderer on our hands."

"Not conclusive?" The Lieutenant held up a red-tipped hand for inspection, her blond head tilted appraisingly. ". . . to a man, perhaps. Honestly, Mark, sometimes the lack of insight in you men astounds me. But then, women are built so differently, aren't they?"

Mark conceded, silently and with approbation.

"Besides, it was physically impossible for Valeri Smith to have hanged herself from that chair."

"What? But I measured . . ."

"I know," said the Lieutenant, beginning now to paint the nails on her other hand, "but only after the body had hung there for some time, and the leather belt that held her had been given time to stretch. Leather stretches frightfully, you know. And, if you will remember, the light fixture was pulled down away from the ceiling, somewhat, which would tend to widen the gap still further — inasmuch as it was higher in its original position. Then, too, the weight of her body, if she had stood on the chair, would have depressed the upholstered seat by two or three inches. There just wasn't sufficient margin to accommodate any one of these factors, never mind all of them."

The Lieutenant hung her nails up to dry, wrists limp, hands high.

"One more thing," she said, "there were pieces of well-trampled plaster that had broken away from the ceiling when the light fixture was pulled from its fastenings, littered over the floor below the body and the overturned chair, where the feet of Valeri Smith would not have stood (due to them being suspended in mid-air before the plaster had fallen), and where no other feet, save those of her hangman, could have stood, and then only prior to, or simultaneous with, the staging of that gruesome little charade, bolted doors and all, that subsequently greeted Mrs. Grebski, Mr. Forbes, and our unhappy selves, in that precise order. So you see, Mark, the suicide supposition would appear to have very little left to support it."

Mark lit a cigarette. "If she didn't hang herself, then how do you suggest someone went about staging a private neck-tie party on the eighth floor of a busy hotel in the middle of the city? It seems to me . . ."

"I strongly suspect," the Lieutenant put in serenely, "that she was hung there, by a person, or persons, yet unknown. Recall now, from your anatomical studies: the relative strength of a woman's neck, in relation to her bodyweight is such that even a short drop of this kind would normally break it. I say *normally*, because it is not inevitable; just probable. But Valeri Smith's neck was not broken; she died of strangulation. Not conclusive, mind, not in itself, but every substantiating clue serves to strengthen the premise as a whole. Don't you agree?"

Before Mark could respond, agreeably or otherwise, the telephone jangled with sudden alarm. The Lieutenant tilted on her ample axis and reached for it, stretching over the desk with the fluent grace of a panther.

This was no long employment, Mark told himself, it was a form of entertainment.

"Lieutenant Carruthers here." She listened a moment, then said, "Fine. Have them bring him up when they get in. And Sergeant, would you send an escort for Forbes. Yes, we're holding him now. I'd like him here when we talk to Greaves."

The sound of the Sergeant's voice crackled discordantly through the receiver, and with a show of agitation she held the instrument away from her ear. When she could get a word in, she said, "Sergeant, I'll sign it . . . when I come by the desk. Right . . . and while you're at it, see if you can chase up those reports from the Coroner's Office. No . . . and I still haven't heard from the Lab, or Records . . . as you say, Sergeant."

When she had replaced the instrument and regained her equilibrium, she said, "*Men!*"

Mark said, "So they've got Greaves."

"Yes, and I've got hunger pangs." She looked at her watch. "How about some lunch?"

"Thought you'd never ask," said Mark.

"Let's try Lil Olys' . . . it's close, and it's quick."

"Match for the damage?"

"Uh-uh." The Lieutenant shook her golden head.

"Dutch?"

"Dutch."

On the street, she walked tall and tempered at his side, with a naked animal stealth that made Mark astutely aware of the almost awesome intelligence and strength possessed by this amazing creature.

SEATED ACROSS FROM CATHY CARRUTHERS at Lil Olys' Cafeteria, Mark was aware that he was sheltering both a childish sense of pride and a feeling of outright resentment beneath a thin disguise of professional pedantry; pride, in his sometimes-role of escort to the magnificent Amazon, and resentment in the endless turning of male heads, and the inevitable ogling. To suppress either activity, he knew, would require an exercise that would be tantamount to the total arrestment of crime itself.

He allowed his mind to wander these avenues for a time, until wild conjecture carried him into a nightmare of such outlandish fancy that he was happy, at length, to turn his thoughts back to the only somewhat less untenable complicacies surrounding the demise of Valeri Smith. With a hot corned beef sandwich under his belt and a cup of coffee warming his palate, Mark began to feel a little less like a student-cadet at the police academy.

"Okay," he said, "so Valeri Smith did not take her own life — then what explanation do you have for this business of the locked room?"

The Lieutenant sipped thoughtfully on a glass of milk.

"Well, once I had ruled out the possibility of suicide, it followed categorically that *someone* had come and gone through one of the two locked doors, or an eighth-story window. Of the three, the connecting door seemed to me the least formidable. That was where I found the toothpick, remember, directly beneath the bolt; which, incidentally, gave me my first clue as to how it was accomplished."

"Do tell," said Mark.

"If you recall, the bolt housing and a notched locking slot that en-

gaged the projecting knob (by the simple expedient of gravity) in both the locked and the open position. It was to offset this gravitational action that the toothpick presumably had been inserted between the bolt and the housing, thereby preventing the bolt from revolving and the projecting knob from dropping into the locking slot. This would permit the bolt, while still in the open position, to be drawn forward (by whatever means) without interception. Once released, the toothpick would simply fall to the floor."

"I'm with you, Lieutenant. A common piece of string could have done it: one end tied to the knob on the bolt, the other passed around the end of the door. Then, with the door closed, the string could have been manipulated from 806."

"Exactly," said the Lieutenant, adding impishly, "but then, how would you dispose of the string?"

"Yeah, how?"

"It puzzled me, too, until I spotted the seascape in 806. The painting had obviously been disturbed; taken down, in fact, and the picture wire removed, then hurried replaced so that the frame rested higher on the wall than before. This, you remember, was not noticeable while the picture was askew, but only after I had straightened it, which was probably why it was overlooked. The wire, of course, made a perfect tool with which to draw the bolt; a wide, non-slip loop would easily have moved the bolt horizontally, then, when slackened, would tend to spring away from the knob, allowing it to fall of its own accord into the locking slot. The wire could then be drawn back into the other room, and replaced. I suspect the end of the wire, twisted to effect the loop, was responsible for the light scratches on the edge of the door and the doorjamb."

"And I suspect you're right," said Mark. He followed her with unbidden eyes as she deserted her chair long enough to acquire a second glass of milk. He sighed. The Amazon in repose was disturbing enough; in motion, she was mesmeric.

"I will admit, though," she said, on resuming her seat, "I did not expect Greaves to be bald (*as a billiard ball*, you said, which was worse still). After all, Greaves had to be our prime suspect. It meant the hair we found in Valeri Smith's clenched fist could not have come from him; at least, not from his head. In view of this, I permitted myself the somewhat improbable supposition that Mr. Greaves was well haired below the neck, if not above it. Purely an assumption, you understand, but still, the hair sample did more closely resemble body hair than the scalp variety. And if it were so, (Greaves being our culprit) it would mean that he had not been fully clothed at the time of the murder.

Then, when you consider that Miss Smith, too, had been scantily clad, if at all, there seemed little doubt they enjoyed a passing familiarity. As a matter of fact, it was possible — and to my thinking, even probable — that Valeri Smith and Wilson Greaves were involved in something of an affair, in the most lurid sense of the word. Their meeting last night in those rooms obviously had been no accident. We can safely assume, I'm sure, that the reservations had been made by the luckless Miss Smith, herself, and with the full knowledge and consent of our Mr. Greaves." The Lieutenant knitted her brows. "But the relationship struck me as being more incongruous."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, for one thing, their ages weren't compatible. She just didn't seem the type, even dead, to become unselfishly involved with a man twice her years, and particularly one who appeared to have no physical attractiveness. Nor did the surreptitiousness of their meeting seem overly indicative of true love. To me, their intimacy suggested something more. Something . . . sinister."

"I smell a motive," said Mark.

"And well you might," said the Lieutenant, "for it is my contention that Wilson Greaves was the victim of blackmail, that for whatever reason he met Miss Smith last night, he eventually recovered and subsequently destroyed, certain incriminating documents. From the dishevelled state of her luggage and those traces of burning in 806, we can reasonably assume that he accomplished his purpose."

"Then why would he kill her?" asked Mark.

"Why, indeed."

AT THE FRONT DESK, THE SERGEANT HAD A SMILE, a pen, and a dotted line for Lieutenant Carruthers. She accepted all three, graciously.

"You absent-minded-professor types are the bain of my life," he said. The Lieutenant smiled, indulgently,

"Any word from the Coroner?"

"Not yet, but the lab reports are on your desk, and if you stop in at Records, I think they've got a couple of surprises for you."

"At this point," said Mark, "nothing would surprise me."

As the Lieutenant moved off down the hall, the Sergeant's eyes went with her. (Quixotically, Mark gave the Sergeant a brief Kangaroo hearing and sentenced him to life).

The Records Department harbored the smallest policeman on the Metropolitan Force, hired some years ago for his status rather than his stature, and whatever his name had been then, he had been labeled

the *Leprechaun* by all and sundry ever since.

Lieutenant Carruthers took the proffered brown manilla file. "Anything of interest?"

"That's putting it mildly," said the Leprechaun, only too pleased to share the fruits of his labors. "It seems that your Mr. Wilson Greaves is not Wilson Greaves at all, but Wayne P. Grayson, vice-president of Halton Mills, the Eastport Plastics Complex."

Mark whistled softly.

"And," said the little man, delighted at the effect of his revelations, "until some time last night, Mr. Grayson's private secretary was a cute little brunette by the name of Valeri Smith."

"This ties things up a bit," said Mark, then, with a look at his partner, he added, "or does it . . . ?"

"Good work, Garfield," said the Lieutenant having done sufficient research of her own to ascertain his true appellation.

The Leprechaun beamed. "No trouble at all, Lieutenant."

Mark was less generous. "Is Garfield your first name," he asked with mock servility, "or your last?"

The Leprechaun levelled a long malevolent look at Mark, and turned on his heel.

"Scheee . . . "

In the squad room, the Lieutenant went over the Records file in its entirety.

"Apparently Forbes was better acquainted with the late Miss Smith than he was prepared to say," she said. "According to this, he's been seen with her on a number of occasions." Then, with a sly smile, she added, "Garfield is his first name . . . it's on his report — G. Le-prohn."

Mark laughed. "You mean you really didn't know?"

Cathy Carruthers shook her lovely head and burst into a fit of laughter. And, together, they guffawed loudly and long. Through tear-misted eyes, Mark shared a rare and precious liaison with his goddess. In an unguarded moment, it seemed, she had descended briefly, but with equivalence, to his own earthy level.

A sharp rap on the office door heralded the arrival of Wayne P. Grayson, alias Wilson Greaves. The uniformed policeman who announced him shoved him into the room, then left immediately, closing the door behind him.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Grayson?"

Grayson stood there looking like a fugitive from a Yul Brynner movie. He was an unpleasant little man, hairless from the neck up, except for a pair of bushy eyebrows that kept his already deep-set eyes

in perpetual shadows.

Grayson addressed himself to Mark. "What's this about? Nobody will tell me a thing."

Lieutenant Carruthers towered above him. "Mr. Grayson," she said, "please sit down."

Grayson looked about nervously, then lowered himself into a chair. He was visibly upset.

The Lieutenant went to her desk and exchanged the Records file she had been holding for the folder containing the Lab reports. Without a word she began to circle the chair in which Grayson was seated, slowly, perusing the papers in the file. Her heels clicked with a hollow echo against the floor, each step seeming to heighten the little man's discomfiture. His eyes reached for her as she came from behind him, then followed her through the arc of his vision, until they lost her on the other side. Mark, watching him, saw no aesthetic favor in the dark, sunken eyes; only a brooding fear. He had seen the Amazon perform this little ritual before, stalling for time, and he never ceased to wonder at the effect of it.

"What is it you want of me?" Grayson was having some difficulty in keeping his voice steady.

The door opened, and the same policeman ushered in the anxious-looking Forbes. The hotel manager did not display the same self-assurance he had rendered earlier. To Lieutenant Carruthers, he said: "I certainly hope you know what you're doing, Lieutenant."

"Sadly enough, for you, Mr. Forbes," she said, pleasantly, "I do. Please be seated."

Mark ushered Forbes to a chair.

"I've just been reading about you, Mr. Forbes," said the Lieutenant, indicating the file in her hand. "It seems the fingerprint on the lightswitch in room 804 was, in fact, yours."

"I already told you it was mine," said Forbes, uncertainly.

"So you did."

Forbes pulled nervously at his tie. "You've got the wrong man, Lieutenant. I did not kill that woman."

"No, Mr. Forbes, you did not," said the Lieutenant, "but you *did* hang her."

Mark raised his eyes in a sign of hopeless bewilderment. At this moment, as co-inquisitor, he felt not a little superfluous. He watched as the Lieutenant seated herself on the edge of the desk and wondered, as he feigned a casual disinterest at the crossing of one Amazonian leg over the other, whether these diversionary tactics were not altogether unintentional.

The Lieutenant turned her attention to the little man. "Suppose you begin, Mr. Grayson, by telling us when you first became enamored of your secretary."

Grayson cast a furtive glance at Mark, then back to the Lieutenant. But his hesitancy was short lived. "I don't suppose there's much use in hiding anything, now."

"We already know what happened, Mr. Grayson. We only want your corroboration."

Grayson shut his eyes in weary resignation, and began to talk.

"Yes, I did get involved with Valeri Smith, Lieutenant. It began about three weeks ago. They say there's no fool like an old fool, and I suppose I set out to prove it. She led me on until I actually believed she was genuinely interested in me. I know it must sound ridiculous, at my age, but last night was supposed to have been a . . . well, a sort of betrothal."

"It was Miss Smith, was it not," said the Lieutenant, "who arranged for the rooms at the Westmore?"

"Yes."

"But it wasn't love you found there, was it, Mr. Grayson?" The Lieutenant's voice had an omniscient ring. "It was avarice — and the threat of blackmail."

Grayson looked surprised, but he continued, undeterred.

"You must understand that I loved her, Lieutenant, damn fool that I was . . . and I trusted her. She managed to lay her hands on documents that would reveal, with further investigation, a shortage in the books of almost \$80,000. Administration is my responsibility, you see; my partner is in charge of production. It was my shortage all right, but all I needed was a little time . . ."

"The price of silence was too high?"

"It wasn't that, exactly," said Grayson. "I think I would almost have agreed to pay her off if it wasn't for the way she went about it. She made an utter fool of me. She told me she already had a lover, her partner in this blackmail routine. She called me repulsive, and loathsome . . . a little, ugly old man . . ."

The words, tumbling out so fast, appeared to choke him. "I didn't want to kill her . . . I didn't mean to . . . it was just that grinning, taunting mouth . . . God, what a fool I've been . . ."

Grayson began to sob, quietly . . . a sort of gutteral hysteria.

"What was she wearing, Mr. Grayson, when you left her?"

"Wearing?"

"Yes, what did she have on?"

"A kind of negligee, I think."

"You're not sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure. It was a negligee, of sorts."

"Pink?"

"Yes."

"And by bunching this garment up around her neck, you were able to strangle her with it?"

"Yes, yes . . ."

"Then what did you do?"

Grayson took some moments to compose himself.

"It wasn't until I had recovered the documents from her suitcase that I realized she was dead. I went to my own room where I burned the book entries in the waste basket, then flushed them down the toilet."

"Did you burn anything else?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I dressed, quickly, as quickly as I could, and I left the hotel."

"Do you remember what time it was?"

"I'm not certain," said Grayson, "shortly after twelve, I imagine."

"And Miss Smith?"

Grayson gave the Lieutenant a look of perplexity. "But I told you, Lieutenant, that she was dead . . . She was lying on the bed . . . on her back."

Lieutenant Carruthers slipped off her perch on the desk and began to pace. "Don't you think it passing strange, Mr. Forbes, for a man to admit to murder, yet deny the inconsequential act of hanging the body to the ceiling?"

"Why ask me?" muttered Forbes. "You have all the answers."

"Even if his motive was to hide his crime, to escape detection . . ."

"I don't know what you're saying," cut in Grayson. "I've already told you what happened."

"You have, indeed, Mr. Grayson. But if *you* didn't hang the unfortunate Miss Smith by her neck . . . *who did?* And *why?*"

Grayson looked from one to the other, as though genuinely mystified by the entire conversation.

"You were seen leaving the hotel by two people, Mr. Grayson; one by chance (the night clerk), the other by design." The Lieutenant looked squarely at Forbes. The hotel man said nothing.

"Let us suppose, Mr. Forbes, that *you* are Valeri Smith's mysterious lover and cohort (purely for the sake of discussion, you understand), and, on seeing Mr. Grayson leave the hotel, you beat a hasty path to room 804 to ascertain the success of your infamous scheme, to claim

your share of the proceeds. You knock furtively on the door, but due to Miss Smith's unhappy estate, she is unable to respond. If the door is not locked, you simply walk in; a locked door, though, would require a key — your pass key, perhaps — but either way, you enter."

The Lieutenant paused before the open window, her back to the three men, a silhouette of uncommon contour against the afternoon sun. To the world at large, she said: "No plan or counterplan had foreseen this contingency. Your first instinct is to put as much distance between yourself and your dead partner as possible, and so you leave, your mind dancing with the grim and sudden imminence of disaster.

"Precisely how long it took you to conclude you were in no apparent danger — providing, of course, that Valeri Smith had not disclosed your identity — I do not know; but I do know that it was at least five or six hours later, before you returned, having in the interim concocted a most ingenious, but nonetheless preposterous, hoax, which you were then preparing to execute. Sadly, it was ill-conceived, and had little chance of success from its very inception."

"This is ridiculous," said Forbes. "you've got no proof . . ."

"But Mr. Forbes, we are merely posing a supposition . . . Now, let us again assume that you are Miss Smith's accomplice. Armed with a scheme to divert the course of justice to your own ends, you re-enter room 804 and make a hurried appraisal of the death-scene. To cover the sounds of your activity, you select an all-night, FM channel on the television, ensuring its volume is loud enough to adequately camouflage your movements, yet not too loud so as to disturb the other guests. The torn and twisted negligee does not lend itself to your project, so you remove it and burn it, as best you can, in the toilet bowl in 806. This you do on the premise that the adjoining room will not be as closely investigated."

The Lieutenant turned to Mark. "Some of the burned pieces I retrieved from the bowl were paper," she said in explanation, "and some were charred remnants of a pink nylon fabric — it's in the lab reports."

"Mmm," said Mark. He had been trying to envisage what Cathy Carruthers, the woman, would look like in a pink negligee, of sorts. Her interruption had been unpropitiously opportune.

The Lieutenant began to pace again, more quickly. "With the belt from Valeri Smith's coat, the end passed through the buckle-guard to fashion a slip-loop, and then attached to the light fixture, you were able to elevate her body sufficiently to allow the loop to pass over her head and tighten around her neck. You take great care, Mr. Forbes, to measure the distance carefully, from chair to toe, so that it will look

as though she had taken her own life, but (*tch, tch,*) you overlooked so many obvious details. Most glaring, was the fact that Valeri Smith had been dead for at least five hours and rigor mortis had already begun to set in. This was evident by the way her limbs hung out away from her body, instead of perpendicularly. From this fact alone I have known from the moment I first set foot in room 804 that the entire scene was a grim and shallow burlesque."

The Lieutenant stopped mid-floor and assumed a thoughtful pose, one hip thrust elegantly awry, a finger pressed to pursed lips. Mark guessed she went 38-25-39 under the sackcloth.

"If that light fixture was to give way under the weight of the body, Mr. Forbes, it would have done so almost immediately. I would guess that as the belt took the strain, the light flickered ominously, and you quickly switched it off at the wall to prevent a short circuit. The finger that pressed the switch, moist from your heinous toil, left a vivid tell-tale print. You see, Mr. Forbes, you would not have turned the light off at the time the body was discovered, as you said you did, because the light, having been broken earlier, was already off. That was a stupid lie.

"I must confess, though, that you carried on from there rather well. The locked room, though by no means novel, was quite tricky. I find it incongruous in the extreme that now, rather than extricate you, it will serve only to ensure your ultimate conviction."

"I hope you're prepared to prove all this?" Forbes' manner was one of enquiry rather than of affirmation.

"Have no illusion there, Mr. Forbes." To Mark, she said: "Two pertinent factors pointed to Mr. Forbes in the second half of his double-barrelled felony — motive and accessibility."

"Right," Mark agreed, "his pass key gave him accessibility, both coming and going. But what possible motive . . . ?"

The Lieutenant turned to Forbes. "It's inconceivable, isn't it, that *any* motive would induce a man to undertake so grim a labor. Motive? Extortion, what else? . . . a vice with which this gentleman is well acquainted. Forbes was the only person who *knew*, without any doubt, that Grayson had killed Valeri Smith. By hiding this from the police, Forbes would have saved Grayson's life, literally. He had visions of selling this same commodity back to Garyson, in installments — it was a blackmailer's dream."

Grayson spun on Forbes. "You swine," he said with vehemence. Then, to no one in particular, he whimpered: "I would have given my life for that girl."

The Amazon looked at Grayson. "You might yet," she said sadly. ●

It was a Danny Rabbit game, something he hadn't seen in years. What other surprises lay in that simple cardboard box?

MAD HARE

By John C. Boland

AS THE FLEA MARKET CROWD BUSTLED AROUND HIM, Herb Gentry said suddenly, "I haven't seen one of those in thirty years!" He spoke softly, surprised by his own mortality. "I had one when I was five or so. I don't know what became of it."

Cheryl glanced away with failing interest.

Nor did he know what had pulled him away from the quilts, macrame and ancient wooden iceboxes to this old card table stacked high with children's games. There were the predictable Monopoly and Risk sets, parcheesi, a clutter of newer inventions tied to popular movies and television programs . . .

. . . and *Danny Rabbit*.

The thin, oblong box was decorated with an ornately-drawn scene of a long-eared hare wearing a waistcoat, looking back over his shoulder on a lane leading to a Victorian mansion. Behind him stood a low wall where ivy entwined among the bricks and large sculptured pots spilled withered flowers. The hare was hunched forward, in an attitude of dread.

When he was a child, Herb recalled with a clarity that surprised him, he had found that scene tremendously evocative. He had imagined a tangled field of grass on the other side of the wall and a tiled foyer beyond the mansion door. And he had speculated on what lay behind *Danny Rabbit* on the country lane that drew such a foreboding glance.

Now — thirty years after he had last seen the box, certainly twenty-five years after he had last *thought* of the game — he smiled painfully at the artist's clumsy line and tremulous crosshatch. Such an obvious attempt to mimic *Alice in Wonderland*'s famous illustrator, John Tenniel.

"It's only two dollars," said the tiny woman behind the table.

"Is the game complete?" For the life of him, he couldn't remember

the board or its pieces.

"Yes, of course."

He turned the box over. Gummed strips sealed the edges.

"It's a shame we have to do that — so many children around. If you're not satisfied, you can bring it back next Sunday. I'll be here."

"Well . . ." He felt foolish, and reached out to set the box back. "It's been a long time, and I haven't any kids."

The woman shrugged. "Did you enjoy the game when you were a boy?"

"I don't know?"

"Then it would be like a new experience, wouldn't it?" Her wrinkled smile offered encouragement.

He handed over two dollars.

"Thank you, young man."

He nestled the box under one arm and started down the meadow aisle in the direction Cheryl had gone. He found her wearing a bored expression as she rummaged at a booth selling phonograph records. Looking over her shoulder, he read the label of a brown-wrapped Victrola. *Caprice Viennais. Fritz Kreisler.*

She folded her arms. "Don't bother. It's all junk."

As he straightened, the October breeze splashed a cold raindrop in one eye.

"So you bought it," Cheryl said.

"Squandered our last two bucks." He blinked rapidly. "We'll be eating rice till Christmas. Are you ready to go?"

"Why not?"

He held his prize in front of him as they crossed the grass toward the car park. "This really brings back memories."

"The golden days of your childhood."

"Well, they weren't golden, but —"

"Don't expect me to play it with you."

He had been going to say *But it was my childhood and I want to remember it.* He didn't think back often.

She read the name. "Danny Rabbit. And the big bad wolf, from the looks. Sort of a scary picture for kids."

She tossed her blond hair in place of whatever else she might have said and climbed over the door of the convertible. Dropping into the seat with a grunt, she stared through the windshield at nothing.

"You'd better put the top up."

He set the box in the back and pulled up the tattered black canopy.

When he climbed in, he couldn't resist another look at the box,

What had the pieces been?

"Jesus," Cheryl whispered.

He shook it gently. There was no rattle.

His wife gave the treasure a sidewise look. "Well, Herb, maybe you paid two skins for an empty box."

"No. It weighs too much. And something shifts a little. The pieces are probably wrapped in the instructions." He tossed the game into the back and started the engine. "I never told you much about my childhood."

She turned the tiny vent window inward as the car picked up speed on the narrow blacktop. The wind blew across her face, carrying away any words.

"It's really nothing I like to remember." He concentrated on crossing a wooden bridge, then spoke again, because the silence would stretch all the way home if he didn't. "It was okay with Mom and Dad in Newbury. But after I lost them, I had to live with Dad's sister and her husband. George and Helen Lette weren't the easiest people to please. And a child doesn't realize that the whole world isn't like his microcosm, that not every family is fanatically disciplinarian."

Cheryl leaned back lazily, as if submitting. Over the windstream, she said: "That's why I'd hate to have children. Why make them go through what I did?"

He had heard the melodramas of her drunken parents almost from their first conversation, not long after she had come to his class with the Ohio twang still humming in each vowel. It had startled him, settled in bachelorhood, his Beowulf study unpublished, that his breezy lectures which evoked mocking smiles from so many of his students actually impressed this girl.

A month or so later, she had almost matter-of-factly accepted his clumsy pass. That was two years ago. They had gotten married as soon as the term ended, renting the old farmhouse at the edge of the dowdy college town. Since Cheryl had left school, they discussed the possibility of children. For political, sociological, philosophical, moral and personal reasons, she wanted none.

HE PARKED UNDER THE TREES IN THE EARLY DUSK. The old colonial house was already damp with a premonition of the Connecticut winter. In the tiny, sparsely-furnished living room, he gathered newspaper and kindling and got a fire going in the grate.

Cheryl had disappeared upstairs.

Sitting on the couch, he examined the *Danny Rabbit* box.

There was so much he had forgotten, glossed over. But the game brought it all back, through that awkward illustration into which he had withdrawn for shelter. At times he had hidden behind the brick wall, or in the bushes by the pond that was invisible behind it. Other days he had chosen one of the deep closets or pantries in the nearby mansion, which seemed inhabited only in *next* rooms, by bashful residents who left telltale changes in the kitchens and parlors but were never glimpsed. *Danny Rabbit* granted refuge from the neighborhood bully, helped him elude the disciplines of harsh parents, made the world right.

Setting the box on his knee, he wondered what had happened to the game when he had gone to live with George and Helen. He had needed it more than ever then.

Had he asked them, once the first was misplaced, to buy him another? Or had he noticed that even the overflowing department store shelves in the weeks after Thanksgiving never seemed to hold that magic box?

He heard the thump of his wife's slippers feet.

"I'll make you a deal," she said from behind him. "If you whip up a couple of drinks, I'll put the chicken on."

He looked around. She was wearing a shallow smile. "That sounds fair," he said, and tossed the game aside.

She turned on her portable television in the kitchen. With his margarita, he stayed to watch a handsome reporter denounce a surprised looking businessman. A half-peeled potato in hand, Cheryl stretched toward the gray wavering face, nodding agreement. Before dinner, she asked for another drink, so he had one, too.

They set up the table near the fireplace. Mellowed, she asked, "How old were you when your parents died?"

"Six, not quite seven, I guess."

"You've never told me what happened."

It was, as far as he could remember, her first suggestion that she wanted to know. "I can't," he said, "because I don't remember. It wasn't a fire, or anything like that, because the house was still there. Aunt Helen stayed there with me after the funeral."

He started to go on when he noticed that she was staring blankly at her glass.

They went to bed early. She expected to be made love to, so he did. Then, after midnight, he was awake remembering how much more he had enjoyed being a boy than he enjoyed being a man. The pressures of childhood had been escaped on that country lane, in that quaint mansion.

Yet it was strange that he couldn't remember the game. Strange that he hadn't seen one in all these years. It must not have sold well.

A face climbed out of his memory: Gap-toothed, bristly-chinned; middle-aged, with wispy gray hair above round eyes. At first, he thought it was the old woman at the flea market that afternoon. Then he remembered how he had gotten his first *Danny Rabbit*. He couldn't picture the man in any other context, or put a name to the face. Yet he could see him on a sunny spring afternoon, grinning from the sidewalk as Herbie played with a gray-skinned baby robin by the front hedge. The man must have been a neighbor whose own children had outgrown board games of terrified hares. He could have been the brother of the flea market hag. From a huge cloth sack, he had produced the box with a flourish, bent close with a snaggled grin. "Don't let Mommy or Daddy see it," he warned.

Why not? Herb wondered.

Curiosity had the better of him now. Carefully, he pulled back the covers and put his feet on the chill floor.

Downstairs, coals glowed coldly in the hearth. Where had he left the box? On the couch? It had fallen off the cushions, found its way under the legs somehow. He sat in front of the spark screen, holding the box and shivering. He had raced to his room with the unexpected gift, hidden it under his bed, to be opened later, when the squabbling and mean-tempered parents were sleeping and he marveled at its treasure.

"*This is just for unhappy little boys,*" the man had said.

He got up and felt his way to the stairs. In the bedroom, there was enough light to pick out Cheryl's blond hair and pale shoulder. He sat on the edge of the bed. Even as a child, he had felt a strong empathy with that slinking hare in the drawing. *Danny Rabbit*'s lips were drawn back from the jutting teeth, a grimace of dread — or if you looked at him just a little differently, a snarl.

Turning over the box, he used a thumbnail to slit the white sealing strips and lifted off the lid.

It wasn't a rabbit precisely, but it was indeed snarling, enraged after thirty years' confinement. Red eyes rolling, it lashed at him with a razor-toothed muzzle as he lifted *Danny* from the box, just as he had done that night so long ago. Stroking the coarse fur, setting it beside the sleeping parents.

In her dream, his wife moaned her discontent. Herb lowered *Danny* to the bed.

He whispered into a bristled ear: "Let's play with Cheryl."

A hopeful note to aspiring authors: persistence pays off!

The Final Rejection

By Vicki Shaull Carleton

DEAR EDITOR:

Congratulations on a fine mystery magazine. I've read *Mike Shayne* from cover to cover and thoroughly enjoyed it. I wish you continued success.

Please accept my first story, "The Final Rejection." I was inspired while parachuting over the wheat fields of Kentucky.

It is my fervent wish that you'll find a place for it in your wonderful magazine.

Yours Truly,
Vicki Carleton

DEAR MS. CARLETON:

Thank you for your very kind letter and interest in our magazine.

It is always gratifying to hear from a new author. Your story is very imaginative. However, it is lacking in characterization and plot.

Perhaps you could rewrite a bit and submit it with the suggestions

I've mentioned.

Yours Sincerely,
The Editor

DEAR EDITOR:

It pains me that you can't publish my short story as is. I thought it was quite clever having the protagonist commit a murder in the line of duty, and get away with it.

Keeping your suggestions in mind, I will try to flesh out the characters more and work on the plot as well.

Since I am about to lose my home, I would appreciate it if you could expedite the publishing of my short story. Thank you.

Yours Truly,
Vicki Carleton

DEAR MS. CARLETON:

Thank you for your rewritten story. Your enthusiasm for writing is refreshing. However, in improving your characters you have weakened your theme. They seem too humorous and not concerned with the murder.

May I suggest careful consideration in rewriting? I believe with a little more effort and diligence, it will all work out.

Yours Sincerely,
The Editor

DEAR EDITOR:

I am extremely resentful of your continued rejections of my short story. I injected humor for a purpose. My characters were too stiff and one-dimensional in the original first draft.

Because of the delay in getting my story published, I have been forced to reside in a lice-infested hotel on the east side. Please note the enclosed address change.

I will attempt to swallow my pride and begin (once again) another rewrite.

Yours Truly,
Vicki Carleton

DEAR MS. CARLETON:

I admire your perseverance in rewriting your story. Please don't be discouraged — you can become a good writer if you keep at it.

I am sorry to hear of your misfortune, but I don't feel that I am to blame for your troubles.

Another rewrite bearing in mind my previous suggestions may have a chance in the magazine.

Yours Sincerely,
The Editor

DEAR EDITOR:

I am very distressed and angry at your refusal to publish my story. Who are you anyway?

I believe we might work out our differences if we could meet in your office. I'm positive the two of us could come up with a solution.

I am no longer at the hotel, but have been compelled to accept charity living at the YWCA until I can make some income at writing. I must close this letter now as there is a curfew to uphold. I anxiously await your next correspondence.

Yours Truly,
Vicki Carleton

DEAR MS. CARLETON:

I have noted that your letters have become increasingly hostile. I assure you this is not the correct approach in getting your story published.

We are usually quite pleased to personally meet some of our fine writers. It would be ill-advised, however, for you to come to our offices at this time.

Unless your story undergoes a vast revision, we cannot accept it. Do you have any other stories that you would like to submit?

Yours Sincerely,
The Editor

DEAR EDITOR:

Why should I send any of my other stories when you seem totally incapable of judging quality work? How did you ever get a job like that, anyway? You obviously don't deserve it. You wouldn't recognize a good mystery if it hit you over the head!

I'm going to give you one last chance with the enclosed (very final) rewrite. After that, I'm not responsible.

Yours Truly,
Vicki Carleton

DEAR. MS. CARLETON:

I have tried my best to be patient with you, but if you are found lurking around our office after hours the police will be notified.

At present it is unlikely that we will ever be able to use your story. One of the basic problems is one of language. Does the term "Bug Off" mean anything to you?

Yours Sincerely,
The Editor

DEAR MR. FRITCH:

Thank you for accepting my story, "The Final Rejection." It has been completely revised. I believe changing the protagonist into a writer was purely inspirational. His clever killing of an editor who rejected his stories was a bit far-fetched I admit, but who's complaining?

I was sorry to learn of the bludgeoning death of MSMM's former editor. Any clues to the identity of the unknown assailant? What a shame!

Ah, well! Because of your generous check, I was able to put a down payment on a new home. Once again I am hard at work on a new short story, as my car payment is due very shortly.

Yours Truly,
Vicky Carleton ☺

Mike's Mail

SHAYNE BOOKS

I am writing to you about Mike Shayne books. I would like to get: *Dividend on Death; The Uncomplaining Corpses; Bodies Are Where You Find Them; Murder wears a Mummer's Mask; Blood on the Black Market; and Murder and the Married Virgin.*

I would like to get these books and other old ones.

Joseph P. Garrigan
Box 223-B Edgewood Dr.
Hastings, PA 16646

We don't have any here, but some of our readers might have extra copies they could sell to you. I purchased mine in a used book store, and I'd say that would be your best bet. Also, see Margaret Kiehl's letter in this issue.

I began to plot his death. Nothing mattered now that my wife was gone — only that I should kill her lover. It would be easy. He'd be dead before he left the airport.

Murder in Mind

By Patrick Scaffetti

IT'S ALWAYS EXCITING TO STAND AT ONE OF THE GATES in a crowded airport terminal, waiting for the passengers to disembark. Especially if you're waiting for someone you love or, as in my case, for someone you're going to kill. You eagerly watch the empty tunnel they'll be emerging from, and, as the moments tick past, your heart-beat quickens with anticipation. Finally, at the end of the tunnel, you see the first few people leave the plane. You crane your neck, stand on tiptoes, and search the faces. Your party is never the first off, and there's always the fleeting fear that they're not on the plane at all. Perhaps you have the wrong flight number. Or maybe they've missed the plane. Then, with a sigh of relief, you spot them, call their name, and wave. They smile and hurry over to you. Sometimes, they die.

On this particular summer evening, I'm waiting for Ivan Hendreikoff, the world famous pianist. I know he's on the plane which has just taxied to a stop outside of the gate window and will soon release its passengers into the air-conditioned terminal. Hendreikoff believes he's arriving in town to perform tomorrow before throngs of adoring fans. He has no idea that he'll be dead before he leaves the airport.

But, after what he's done to me, he should expect death to lurk around the nearest corner. He should not underestimate his enemy's capacity for revenge. That is his fatal mistake.

But what, you ask, could a famous pianist have done to a quiet, passive man like myself to make me want to murder him? I'm just a menial clerk who lives alone in a second floor walk-up apartment. But once I was more than this, much more, and Hendreikoff destroyed it all.

Not so long ago, I was married to a beautiful woman named Monique. She had lovely blond hair, an exquisite figure, and she was totally devoted to me. Our life together couldn't have been happier, and our future was filled with promise. At the accounting firm where I worked, I was rapidly gaining the recognition of the higher-ups. In a short while, I expected to be promoted to an executive position.

When Monique and I had been together for five years, she suddenly decided that she wanted to take piano lessons. She had taken lessons as a young girl but had given them up. Now, she wanted to resume her studies. I agreed without hesitation. Such a beautiful woman should be able to make beautiful music.

Monique began taking lessons from an elderly maestro, and her natural talent for the instrument soon made her superior to her instructor. She found a new teacher, and, within five months, her abilities surpassed his. At night, she would play for me — symphonies, as well as contemporary arrangements. Listening to her, I was in heaven.

When famous pianists performed in the area, Monique and I were always in the audience. Frequently, we would slip backstage afterward to speak with them. They never failed to appreciate Monique's beauty and charms.

Then, last year, Ivan Hendreikoff appeared in concert at the Royal Arcadian Music Hall. In the darkened theater, Monique and I listened to him play, our hands clasped together. When the concert ended, we went backstage to compliment him. The moment the pianist's eyes came to rest upon Monique, I knew that he was smitten. But I trusted my wife completely, and I knew that her devotion to me was unshakeable.

We spoke with Hendreikoff for over an hour. He told us that he would be in town for a week, and he generously offered to give Monique a few afternoons of instruction. Of course, she was delighted to have such an accomplished musician for a teacher, and I was happy for her. This was my mistake.

During the week, while I was away at work, Monique and Hendreikoff spent hours together. She played new compositions for me each evening, and I blindly detected no change in her. As always, I trusted her implicitly and had faith in her love.

Hendreikoff was scheduled to leave at the end of the week to perform in Vienna. When I returned home from work on Friday, I found a hastily scrawled note from Monique on my desk. She had gone with Hendreikoff. She said that she had fallen in love with him and intended to marry him as soon as we could be divorced.

I was dazed by the news, but I vowed not to follow her. In my mind, I was certain that she would come to her senses once the infatuation had worn off and return to me. For two months, I waited for my wife to come back, but I didn't receive even a note from her. Hendreikoff's performances in various cities of the world were publicized in the newspapers, and I could only assume that Monique was with him.

During this time, I found it impossible to concentrate on my work, and I was given several reprimands. Finally, I was demoted. My salary was reduced by over half, and any hopes of a promotion were shattered. Still, I knew that once Monique returned to me, I would be able to start anew elsewhere. With her beside me, I could not help but become a successful man.

Then, one evening, I gasped to see a photograph of Monique and Hendreikoff in the newspaper. The headline read:

MISTRESS OF FAMED PIANIST COMMITS SUICIDE

My hands began to tremble violently as I read the article. Hendreikoff had tired of Monique and abandoned her in Paris. Alone in her hotel room, she had slashed her wrists in grief. She was already dead when the maid found her.

Slowly, the realization sank in that Monique would never come back to me. My lovely wife had taken her own life because the pianist had rejected her.

That night, I began to plot Ivan Hendreikoff's death. My job suddenly seemed unimportant. Nothing mattered now that I knew Monique was gone forever. As long as I was able to kill Hendreikoff, I no longer cared what happened to me.

AND, NOW, I'M WAITING HERE TO EXACT MY REVENGE. The knife is in my pocket, ready to perform as commanded.

The first passengers begin to appear, carrying flight bags. Young couples with sleepy-eyed children emerge, elderly ladies, executive types. Gradually, the flow begins to dwindle. But where is Ivan Hendreikoff? He must be on the plane.

Relax, I tell myself. There is always the fear that somehow you've made a mistake, that your victim is not on the plane. And then I see him. Bronzed by the sun, tall, handsome, his coal black hair just beginning to gray at the temples. He's carrying an attache case, taking long, confident strides. Yes, this is Ivan Hendreikoff.

I lift my arm into the air to attract his attention. He glances in my direction, our eyes meet, and he looks away. He chooses to ignore me, though I'm certain he remembers me. That's all right. Deep inside,

hidden from view, I know that fear is chilling his heart. But he conceals his emotions well — he continues to walk toward the exit gate, knowing that I'll be waiting for him.

Casually, I approach him, grasping the handle of the knife in my pocket. He doesn't even look at me as I move nearer. Now, I'm beside him. I brush against his side as if I'm watching for someone behind him. At that moment, I yank my hand from my pocket and aim for his back. He looks at me quizzically as soon as he feels the pressure of my hand.

"Excuse me," I say aloud. To myself, I say, *You're dead!*

"Martin, over here," a woman calls out, and Ivan Hendreikoff hurries over to her. They embrace.

No one knows I've committed a murder, I think in sudden ecstasy. *I've pulled off the perfect crime.*

Tomorrow, I'm going to kill a well-known oceanographer. He tortured my beautiful wife, Ingrid, into giving him my map to the sunken Spanish galleon off the Atlantic coast of Florida. Then he murdered her and beat me to millions of dollars in golden doubloons. But he'll pay for his crime. His plane lands at eight, and I'll be waiting for him.

Perhaps I've even met *your* flight — I've been at many airports over the years. I'm the one who always waits until the last passenger has disembarked, then I walk away alone.

©

NEXT MONTH

a brand new Major Lansing novelet

MURDER UNDER THE CHRISTMAS TREE

by W.L. Fieldhouse

A vampire — in this day and age? Nonsense! Still, it wouldn't hurt to play it safe.

The Vampire Man

By Percy Spurlark Parker

"DON'T LIE TO ME. YOU WOULDN'T BE HERE if you weren't afraid of vampires."

"I told you I'm here for a story, Mr. Grubbs, nothing else." The old man had flown in himself on his way to L.A., and asked me to come by and get the lowdown on Grubbs, who called himself the Vampire Man.

Grubbs was supposedly the foremost authority on vampires. It was said he'd combed the world in search of them, and had even dispatched a couple himself. On first impression, however, I'd have to label him a nut. He was a wild-looking old codger, with a stringy grey hairdo that looked like it was fashioned by Phyllis Diller. His robe was long and heavy looking, a dingy brown in color. His face showed a lot of wear. Bags hung low under his dark eyes and were a shade or two more pronounced than his otherwise pale drawn complexion. A large, highly-polished crucifix hung around his neck, easily the most noticeable object in the room, aside from the four full length mirrors which sat in each corner.

We were in an old farm house which Grubbs was using as his home base in the area. I figured he was probably going for the theatrics. Traveling as much as he did, he was sure to have some money and could most likely afford an apartment downtown in one of the better buildings. But he had chosen this dilapidated place on barren land that no sane person would want any part of. Plus the topper had been when I made the appointment with him, he insisted I arrive at sunset.

I introduced myself by showing him my press card stating I was Walter Kline of the International News Service, but he had given it only glancing notice and ushered me into this room, directing me to a high-back wooden chair which pinpointed me in the mirrors.

"I've been told many tales, Mr. Kline." Grubbs said, standing behind his desk, a hand clasped tightly about the crucifix. "People have tried to deny their fear, their knowledge of the undead. But it is

there. Deep within them perhaps, but there."

The old man hadn't sent me out here to argue with Grubbs, although I felt it was an argument Grubbs wanted so he could prove point by point that only *he* had the true answers.

"Okay, lets say there are some things I'm not sure about — religion, the supernatural, good and evil. What are you doing about it?"

Grubbs beamed. "I don't usually get a convert this quickly, Mr. Kline. Are you being patronizing?"

"Just keeping an open mind. You say there're dark forces working; I say convince me. Is that fair?"

Grubbs thought a moment, his mouth pushed out, then he nodded. "Fair enough, Mr. Kline. But believe me, there are dark forces all about. Strong forces, Mr. Kline, evil forces. But they haven't been able to defeat the power of God's love." He raised the crucifix from his chest and for a moment it appeared to glitter in his hand. I know it was just the light in the room bouncing off polished metal, but for a quick second a cold chill ran through me.

Grubbs let the crucifix fall heavily back onto his chest and sat down, digging a thick tattered notebook from the desk drawer. "There are seven years of study within these pages, Mr. Kline, since my first encounter with vampires."

"Seven years is a long time to be looking for something that doesn't exist — "

"What happened to your open mindedness," Grubbs shouted, eyes wide, the dark pupils rimmed red.

"I didn't finish, Mr. Grubbs. It's a long time, I was going to say, unless you've found something along the way."

Grubbs face settled into a crooked smile. "I found some things," he nodded, patting the notebook. "They're all documented in here. But I haven't been trying to prove the existence of vampires, Mr. Kline. I've been trying to exterminate them." The smile vanished as the words stumbled from his lips. "I learned of them in a most horrid way, when the devils claimed my daughter. You have no idea how I fought with myself before I'd admit my own child was a vampire." He paused. "I had to kill her."

"Your own daughter?"

"It was the most difficult thing I've ever done in my entire life, and yet the easiest. It was the only way her soul would find peace." He paused, looking down at his notebook. "And I'm afraid that if I hadn't freed her from the bounds of the undead, she would've turned me into one of them. Thus, Mr. Kline, my search has a two-fold purpose. Revenge. Pure naked revenge for the life of my daughter. And self

preservation." Suddenly he was standing waving his arms about. "Do you know how many times they have tried to kill me? Fifteen, Mr. Kline. Fifteen. But I've been waiting for them." His voice grew louder. "I live in out-of-the-way places like this farm house and wait for them." He was breathing heavily now, his lips moistened, his eyes reddening. He clutched the crucifix with one hand, reached inside his robe with the other, shouted, "God is almighty, destruction to all evil!" — and he pulled a wood stake from inside his robe.

Grubbs leaned across the desk toward me, the stake held high, its point needle sharp and blackened with what looked like dried blood. His gaze was unflinchingly upon me as he continued. "I've sent fifteen of their souls back to God. They can be anywhere. The street walker at Times Square. The skycap at O'Hara Field. The cab driver at Hollywood and Vine. Or even a reporter from the International News Service." The stake shook as his hand began to tremble. "Do you believe me, Mr. Kline? Have I convinced you?"

My throat felt very dry, but I managed to say, "Yes, Mr. Grubbs, I'm convinced." Then I pulled my gun and shot him. The slug caught him right at the bridge of the nose. He had flashed a moment of surprise at first seeing the weapon, but I hadn't given him much time for anything else.

BACK AT MY OFFICE THE OLD MAN WAS SITTING behind my desk when I came in. "How did it go, Kline?"

"He could've just been a nut, or he could've given us some trouble one of these days, so I killed him."

"And the body?"

"The only thing that'll ever find him are a few earth worms."

"Good. Take care of this one too, I got a little thirsty waiting for you."

Hazel, the receptionist from down the hall, lay crumpled on the chair by my desk, two swollen puncture marks at the side of her neck. I'd taken her out a few times, and the old man knew it. He kept throwing tests like this at me. But we'd made a pact and I was sticking to it. I ran his errands and he kept my bank account fat.

"Consider it done, sir."

A smile ripped across his pale face. "Good," he said, standing. The window was open behind my desk. A light breeze fluffed his black cape. "Until next time, Kline," he said, and he and the cape became a massive dark blur.

As I closed the window, I caught a glimpse of a huge bat framed against the moon. Then I turned back to attend to Hazel's body. ●

Me, judge a beauty contest? I do not even own a tape measure with which to audit the assets. Besides, it could be hazardous to my health!

A Little Light Larceny

By Arthur Moore

MULROONEY THE COP SAYS TO ME, "DUBOIS, YOU ARE A VAG and a bum and you wouldn't dress up the scenery if you was in a swamp."

I gulp at him and his partner, Ives, and I say, "But, but, but . . ."

"So," Mulrooney prods his bony finger into my lungs, "we are givin' you the word. Haul outa our precinct. You dig?"

"But, but, but . . ."

"Otherwise it's thirty days in the slammer." Him and I've pile into the prow bucket and blast off, leaving yards of city rubber on the

street. They are a couple of coppers who couldn't cope with calamity — especially Jane, but they can buffalo me.

Mulrooney is right, for once. Lady Luck has only touched me with the tippy top of her wand. She gave me a case of influenza.

Mulrooney would hand me the wheel from a steamroller when I am going down for the third time, which gives you an idea of what kind of pals we are. Katzie's Saloon is in their precinct, and so is Mrs. Sherpy's boardinghouse where I live. The only way I can stay out of the cooler is to find a job.

And with my luck I might get one.

So natch I slide over to Katzie's to present my problem to the mouth-of-the-month, Jonesy, the bartender. He is a fat fourflusher who fancies himself a flash at fixing the follies of his fellows. He gives advice. The good side of this is that while he is fumbling with my future he forgets now and then and fills a flagon with el foamo, a freebie.

Only this time Soapy DeVille is belly to the bar, belting a brew and beaming at the blather which Jonesy is laying on him.

"Here he is now," Jonesy says, and Soapy swivels to shake my five.

"We were just discussing you, Dubois," Soapy remarks with a con smile. "Have a cigar." He hands me the Havana and Jonesy holds the lighter. I have to look in the mirror to see if it is me they mean.

"He's perfect for the part," Jonesy says, wriggling his foolish moustache.

"What part?" I naturally ask.

"Dubois," says Soapy, clearing his throat, "you are as dedicated and discriminating a delegate as there is in the district. I have got a proposition to play on your piano, you bein' a patron of pulchritude."

"He's seen ever' pitcher Doris Day ever made," Jonesy giggles.

I am uneasy about this approach, and the cigar. Soapy has never noticed me before, except to drop ashes on. But I reflect that I have nothing to lose; and anyhow since I have got a cigar from the deal Soapy might say the magic words. And he does.

"Jonesy," he says, "give my pal a beer."

Now I am beginning to smell a rodent and it is not Mickey Mouse. Soapy wants something."

"Lay it on him," Jonesy urges.

Soapy nods and brushes off my threads. He even takes the flower out of his buttonhole and puts it in my pocket. "Dubois, as you know, I am going straight . . ."

"Tell 'im the proposition," Jonesy says.

"I'm comin' to it. Dubois, I am thinking of going into a legit enterprise. I am —"

"He's going to advertise," Jonesy breaks in. Jonesy cannot stand to listen. He has got to do the talking no matter what comes out. "This here is a beauty contest for advertising purposes, and —"

"A beauty contest?"

Soapy said, "I am opening a auto painting business and the beauty contest is a gimmick which will nose the news to the neighborhood."

"And Myra is set to win," blurts Jonesy. "That's what he wants you for." He taps my clavicle.

"I never entered one in my life," I say.

Soapy shakes his head.

Jonesy yells, "You don't dig nothing! Myra is Miss Show Biz. She has won contests from here to Devil's Island. Soapy wants you —"

"To be the judge," Soapy says, pushing more brew at me.

I am paralyzed with the idea. I blink at both of them in astonishment. I do not even own a tape measure with which to audit the assets. Soapy shakes me back to reality and tells me I am very pale. I am pale because my seven red corpuscles are all up in my brain memory-banks, riffling through the files of the Police Gazettes I have seen in the barber shop.

"There is broad responsibility in judging this fine feminine festival," Soapy warns me, "and we do not want just any fink who will flinch or fix the parade in any fashion. You are the faithful friend I favor."

I am reeling with the ring of those endearing sentiments when I remember about Mulrooney and Ives who are seriously set on slinging me into the slammer. "Is there any cash connected with this commission?" I ask.

Jonesy frowns and Soapy looks like I have just shot him in the liver with a poisoned pogo stick. "I told you I am going straight. I have to contend with taxes now. Besides, I got to certify that you, as judge, are not receiving stock, stipend or staple from me as sponsor."

Jonesy hisses, "Do you want cats to think there is collusion?"

Soapy looks down at his nose. "Do you want folks to figure it is fixed?"

"Well," I ask, "ain't it?"

Soapy changes the subject. "Dubois, this here is a grand gander at the greatest group of girls you ever glommed. As judge you will be the big noise, and you will have to beat 'em off with a stick."

That is an impressive argument. Most girls only look at me if they cannot find the doormat.

Jonesy says, "We will be holdin' the contest here in Katzie's.

There will be a hunnerd broads beating on the bell when the news gets bruitied about."

Soapy hands me a photo. "Here is a picture of Myra, my girlfriend, the contest winner. She goes all over the country winnin' contests."

I look at it, a photo of a blond belle in a beaded bathing bit. There is a streamer from one shoulder to her ample waist with lettering on it that reads: MISS MOTORCYCLE PARTS.

"As you can tell," Soapy says, "Myra has got class. This is her when she won in Coyote Stomp, New Mexico."

He hands me another photo. It is the same girl, only this time she is wearing some loose tree leaves and a streamer that reads: MISS ARTESIAN WELL.

"She won easy," he says, "and I do not figure she will have no trouble here, do you?" He leans towards me.

I am shaking my head when he smooths a contract on the bar and hands me a ball point. "Sign where it says, Sole Judge."

"Can I read the fine print?"

"It'll only mix you up."

Soapy watches me sign, drinks the rest of my beer and disappears with the contract. I am now official.

JONESY ADVERTISES THE UPCOMING to anyone who will listen. The word spreads like summer ants. There is a five dollar entrance fee — which Jonesy is getting part of for the hall — and the grand prize is advertised at seventy-five clams and a free auto paint job in any color. The contestants are to sign up between the hours of eight and nine in the morning, one day only, Monday.

"That's to keep Gloria La Marr out of the contest," Jonesy informs me. "She thinks the world starts at noon."

"What if she shows up?"

He frowns, "Mulrooney and Ives was in here lookin' for you."

"It is not easy to dodge the badge boys for three days, but no one can keep Monday from coming. It does. I sidle in the back door and watch Soapy sign the shapely sirens to the contest sheet. There are forty dolls, yawning and chattering, but Myra is not in the line. She is first on the list, of course, but she is home in the sack.

Soapy notices me and comes over to lay another photo on the bar. "Myra will make this bunch look like an ad for hoof and mouth disease," he says with confidence.

I stare at the photo. This time Myra is surrounded by five gangling females who are sitting on a gas buggy in front of a garage. Myra's streamer says: MISS BATTERY CHARGER OF 196-

The last number has been scratched out.

The signing-in goes like clockwork — but at one minute to nine Gloria La Marr shows up.

There is a huge hush when she bulges in the door. Jonesy's mouth drops open and for once nothing comes out but gurgles. Soapy drops his cigar as Gloria surges and sidles to the sign-in book.

Eleven girls cross off their names and slink away.

Gloria is wearing a mink stole, smartly in style, but she slips it off and signs her name. Then she looks around at us; we are standing like in a spell. She slithers past in a scandalous scanty scrap of skim splashed with sequins.

Twelve other girls sigh and slide out to the curb and get lost.

Gloria wriggles across the floor, dragging her mink. This is her usual method of moving, a cross between a writhe and a squirm. She is not doing her number, but a spotlight follows her — and Katzie's does not have a spotlight.

I can hear King Farouk hammering on the inside lid of his casket. She makes the remaining contestants look like a picked-over gaggle of chimney sweeps.

Then, at the doorway, she smiles and unfastens something and the sequins slide to the deck. There is a great sigh, like Hurricane Betsy just leveled Miami. Gloria is undulating there in her usual costume, the one she wears at the Club 97 where she works.

She is clad in one hummingbird's wing and a pinch of pollen.

She takes a breath and lets it out and another fifteen girls groan and stumble away.

There is only one doll left, and somebody leads her to the door because she is blind as a can of spaghetti. She is also a former Miss America, but beside Gloria she looks like the guy in the parking lot who sharpens scissors.

THE FOLLOWING DAY SOAPY IS VERY MOODY. He is staring lovingly at a snapshot of Myra which was taken near a factory in Quebec. Myra's head is sticking out of a roll of rug and the caption says, MISS WALL-TO-WALL CARPET.

"I think I will call off the whole thing," he says. "We got a very poor showing."

That's when Faceless Robert shows up. "Gloria signed to enter this contest," he says. "It goes on like scheduled."

"But-but-but—" says Soapy.

Faceless is picking his teeth with a matchstick and glaring at Soapy. He wants the advertising for the Club when Gloria wins. He is good at

glaring. He has eyes like the taillights on a water softener. "Gloria," he says, "Never lost a contest in her life."

This is a fact. It is common knowledge that in the days when Gloria was too poor to buy a bathing suit, she once showed up for a contest in a raincoat. They gave her the prize without asking her to unbutton it.

"It ain't fair!" yells Soapy. "She's a professional — girl!"

Faceless grates at him. "They tell me this Myra has been ever'thing but Miss Typhoid Epidemic." He stands nose to nose with Soapy. "Are you pickin' the winner?"

"Not me," says Soapy. "Dubois is the judge."

My knees are vibrating together. Faceless looks down at me. He is so close I can see the blood spots on his tie from where he had breakfast. The two slits that he sees through widen slightly because he is surprised.

"Dubois is a very honest vag," he says. Then he joins the two hoods at the door who are toting .45 caliber voting machines. He looks at me again, then he disappears.

When it is certain that he is gone, Soapy pushes me into a corner. "The chips is down, Pal. I want you should show your loyalty by signin' this document." He whips out a paper and aims a pen at me.

"W-w-what is it?"

"It says Myra won the contest."

"But, but; but —"

"Otherwise I will have to pony up seventy-five clams to Gloria."

"But don't put a date on the paper," Jonesy advises. "Maybe we can sneak the contest later."

"Sign," says Soapy.

"But b-but, what about Faceless?"

Jonesy frowns. "Mulrooney and Ives was in here askin' about you."

FACELESS IS SITTING IN MY PAD WHEN I GET HOME that night. He is picking his teeth with the matchstick when I click the lightswitch. Seeing him is a terrible strain on my heartvalve.

The contest is two days away. I am wondering if he knows it is already won.

"Little pal," he says in his scratchy way, "After you vote for Gloria I will spring for a freebie an' a ringside seat for Gloria's number."

"T-t-thanks, F-Faceless, only . . ."

"Gloria has got her little heart set on winnin'."

"B-b-but Soapy m-made me sign an a-a-a-agreement."

Faceless stands up and I can almost feel the cement congealing

around my ankles. "That was a very unfriendly act. Maybe you didn't know what you was signing."

"I g-g-guess not, F-Faceless, Gloria is a c-c-cinch. I don't see how she can l-l-l-lose."

He nods and examines the matchstick. "Natch, little pal." He goes to the door and slips out like a burglar — which he once was.

I contemplate the future. There is nothing left to do but panic.

I run into the street and I keep running till I run into Mulrooney and Ives.

"The handcuffs!" I shout. "Put the handcuffs on me! You promised me thirty days!"

SOAPY COMES TO SEE ME IN THE SLAMMER. He is very low.

"We had to call off the contest," he says. "Nobody showed up but Gloria and she walked out in a huff on account of there wasn't no competition."

"She's got pride," I tell him. "What about Myra?"

He sighs. "I have lost her . . ."

"You mean because of the contest not being fixed?"

"No, because of her career. She likes to travel, you know. She was offered a week as Miss Goat's Milk. She left for Omaha last night."

I sigh with him. "That's show biz," I say.

Mike's Mail

SHAMUS LOVER

Just want to let you know I really enjoy the Mike Shamus cartoon strip. Hope it will continue to be a monthly feature for many years. Maybe eventually it could be published in a book by itself. But in the meantime keep it coming every month in MSMM. It's so funny I love it!

Mrs. Paul Reznick
Torrington, CT

We've got enough cartoon strips right now to last well into 1981, and perhaps Fred Fredericks can be persuaded to do some more when we run out.

Noise! It was everywhere, surrounding him. He would kill to silence them. A quick knife in the back would be best. Or carbon monoxide in the garage. A gun with a silencer on it. An anti-noise murder!

A QUIET DEATH

By Jon L. Breen

WALTER ONLY WANTED QUIET. Some of us require it more than others, and for those who do, the apartment house where Walter lived was the wrong place to be. It was on a fairly quiet street — he had chosen it for that — but he had not been able to choose his neighbors, and the walls of the building were rather thin.

If I were paranoiac, Walter often told himself, I would be convinced that all these people were involved in a conspiracy to drive me mad. The noise they made was not normal, everyday noise. It seemed to have a calculated aggressiveness about it.

Take Mr. and Mrs. Corby in the apartment to the right of Walter's. No couple could have fights over the trivia they fought over, unless they had some definite reason — the conspiracy, of course — for wanting to shout at the top of their lungs. If Mrs. Corby went shopping dressed in shorts, Mr. Corby would become jealous and they would yell about that. (Walter thought the Corbys should have a common interest in keeping Mrs. Corby's corpulent and hairy legs covered up). If she spent ten dollars on some unnecessary trinket ("piece of crap," according to Mr. Corby), they would yell about that for a while. To give Mrs. Corby the benefit of the doubt, it was true that her husband invariably started it, started the yelling at any rate, but once they were in gear, her shouts were louder and shriller and more grating than his.

"You think I'm some Greek shipping magnate or something?"

he was roaring this particular night. "You think I'm Rockefeller, you spend good dough on that piece of garbage?"

"Yeah, and so what? You'd rather have it on a horse?"

"Shut up!"

"You'd rather spend it on some cheap whore?"

"Shut up!"

A loud whack. Tears. louder shouts. Soon they would start to get really abusive. Just sparring so far. No furniture breaking.

For a time at least, the Corby's domestic squabbles had had the fascination of a bad soap opera, though not for long. The apartment on the left, however, Gordon's apartment, had no such redeeming value in its noise-making. It was drillingly monotonous, always the same. *Click click click ding! Click click click click ding!* And it would go on far into the night, long after the Corbys had had their fill. Gordon seemed like such an indolent chap when Walter would meet him in the hallway or down by the mailboxes. Surely his aspirations as a writer didn't really cause him to hit the keys so devotedly. Surely it was just a tape of a person typing he played, as part of this odd conspiracy against Walter. If he did suffer from paranoia, Walter reflected, surely that is what he would think. And surely he'd be right.

To the rear were Jack and Fred, relatively quiet fellows really. But they had some kind of game they played several evenings a week. It sounded to Walter a good deal like handball at times, but he'd decided that it really involved throwing a tennis ball across the room into a wastebasket. He could hear them keeping score in decently low voices. They seemed as devoted to the game as many men their age were to pro football. Walter could not understand how the simple game could hold such a fascination for them, unless they did it to torment him. *Bounce, bounce, bounce, thud!* Occasionally a metallic crash as the wastebasket fell over, and one of them would run over to set it right. They surely would tire of it in time, were it not for the conspiracy.

Conspiracy. Every time the word flashed across his consciousness, Walter laughed inwardly. Sometimes he laughed outwardly. He always laughed at the idea that his neighbors could be combined in a conspiracy against him. Laughed and believed it at the same time.

Above, there was Margie's stereo. Margie was a lovely girl, with a face made for silent movies. But her stereo. It was always some rock group, but Walter had no special feelings about that. The *1812 Overture* or any other loud music would have annoyed him just as much. Noise is noise.

The stereo had to be loud, *loud*, **LOUD!** It would outlast the Corbys

but seldom the typewriter. Beautiful as she was, Margie often seemed the most zealous of the conspirators.

Still, if it were truly a conspiracy, they would never stop until they had Walter gibbering. They did, thank God, sometimes stop. Margie went out sometimes, as did one or the other of the Corbys, as did Jack and Fred, as did even Gordon, rarely. The fights and the ballgame and the stereo and the typewriter were seldom all going at once, as they were this night. And they all slept. Sometimes at the same time.

Lying in bed now, resigned to the impossibility of sleep, Walter wondered why they didn't seem to bother each other. Some people are oriented toward noise, resigned to noise. Some people even *need* noise, he decided.

One by one, they fell quiet. First, the ballgame ended. Jack was unable to contain a victory whoop — usually Fred was the winner — but after that they were no problem. Good fellows really.

Then the stereo came to a halt. Margie was not a bad girl really. Walter could easily love her in a silent Clara Bow world.

The Corbys made peace. Sobs turned to giggles, more disgusting really. Their giggles turned to silence at last, and there was only the typewriter clicking and dinging, and finally Gordon seemed to have finished his nightly ten thousand words and even the clicking and dinging ceased.

Walter sighed in his bed and mused on what he would do to solve his problems if he had unlimited resources. Move to the country, of course. But what if he wanted to stay here in this really quite pleasant apartment on a quiet street? To stay here with quiet?

Could he buy them off? Rent Gordon an office so that he could type away from home? Buy Margie some earphones? Provide the Corbys with a weekly check on the condition that they not fight, which they could never live up to, of course? Start a professional wastebasketball league and assign Fred and Jack to Buffalo?

Quiet now. This was how it should be. Faint hum of traffic blocks away, but that was all. Walter could handle that. This was a quiet apartment, truly a quiet apartment. Noise is pollution. It doesn't belong. It's an intruder. Like smog. Quiet is a clear day. Restful. Relaxing. Soon rest, soon sleep, soon . . .

Honk!

"Hey, Margie!"

Walter groaned, turned over, looked out the window. It was the boy friend, down the street, three floors below. What was his name? Chet?

"Be quiet! It's late!" her musical voice, sounding scandalized but delighted, called down to him.

"I'm coming up, Margie!"

"It's too late!"

"I'm coming up, or I'll say what I want to say from here!"

"All right! all right!" she called back, laughing.

The car door slammed. He was coming up. Did it mean more stereo? Loud talk? Violently creaking bedsprings? It meant some kind of noise, of that Walter was sure.

Margie, a nice girl basically, had been seduced by the noise society. The noise of the stereo. The noise of a boy friend. What was Chet but a honking horn in man's clothing, a personification of noise? Like bad drives out good, noise drives out quiet.

And Chet drives out Walter. Was that, Walter asked himself with some amusement, the real point?

Solutions like soundproof offices and earphones could solve some noise problems. Divorce could solve others. But in a case of noise personified, only murder could do the job.

Walter, lying in his bed and listening to Chet's shoes tramping heavily on the stairs, snickered at the amusing idea of an anti-noise murder. A quiet weapon would be symbolically necessary. No point in cutting down Chet in a hail of machine-gun bullets. He might even enjoy it. A quick knife in the back would be best. Or carbon monoxide in the garage, looks like an accident. A gun with a silencer on it — did they really work?

Chet's shoe struck the creaking stair two steps from the top of the flight. Then Walter heard him enter Margie's apartment. One point in Margie's favor was that she didn't walk heavily. He hardly knew she was there but for the stereo and the periodic visits of Chet. A nice quiet girl at heart. If only she could learn to appreciate good music, the soft kind they played in the dentist's office, the kind that accompanied silent movies.

Walter now found himself listening intently. My, but they were quiet up there. No voices, no stereo, nothing.

Ordinarily, thankful for the unexpected quiet, Walter would have returned to his sleep-inducing routine. But this time, this time he felt compelled to get up. The silence was not only unexpected. It was unnatural.

He dressed quickly, left his apartment, crept silently up the stairs. He avoided the creaking step.

Walter hated doorbells. He was about to tap lightly on Margie's door

when it suddenly swung open, and she stood facing him, wrapped in a short white bathrobe.

Margie, who normally seemed so cool and self-possessed, was facing him with an expression of shock and horror on her pale face. She seemed unable to speak.

"Good evening, Margie. What's the matter? Is something wrong?"

"No, Walter. I'm just surprised to see you, that's all."

"Were you going somewhere?"

"No, you — you rang the bell, didn't you? Didn't I hear the bell?"

"No," Walter said. "And I'm very quiet. I'm sure you could not have heard me coming. So you must have been going somewhere, weren't you?"

"Like this?" she said, with a very weak smile.

Walter looked down at her legs. They were pale as her face but beautifully shaped. Since she usually wore the youthful uniform of blue jeans, he had never seen her legs before, and he regretted the lack of time to admire them.

"Look, I feel there's something wrong, Margie. I feel you need my help. Do you?"

Margie took a deep breath, started to say something and fainted. As she fell, her bathrobe came open, and he saw that she was covered with blood.

Walter lifted her up and carried her in to the sofa, scarcely noticing her nude body in his horror. Once in the apartment, he understood.

The blood was not hers. It was Chet's. He lay in a pool of it on the floor of the shower. With wonder and some admiration, Walter reconstructed the probably events in his mind. She had lured him into the bathroom, suggesting perhaps a communal shower, but before the water could even be turned on, she had severed his jugular vein with a quick slash of the knife. Lots of blood, but a very quiet death if she broke his fall, lowered him very quietly to the shower floor. The blood was largely confined to the bathroom. She had put on her robe and was going to figure out how to dispose of the body when Walter had discovered her.

Such a quiet death.

Naturally, Walter cleaned up the blood and helped her dispose of the body. She seemed to be in a stupor when she came to, but still she knew exactly what needed to be done. Down the trash chute for discovery the next morning. All night to think up a story for the police. She asked Walter if he would keep quiet about what had happened, and he almost laughed.

"Why did you kill him?" Walter asked finally, when they had re-

turned to her apartment?

"You wouldn't understand," she said.

"Perhaps I would. Please tell me."

"I killed him because he made too much noise," she said. "There. You probably think I'm mad."

"No," Walter assured her in a soft voice. "No, I don't."

"He was a very noisy person. I killed him because he was noisy." She laughed. There was a hint of hysteria in her laugh. "It even sounds crazy to me."

"No, it isn't at all. But you sounded so glad to see him."

"Because I knew what I was going to do. All the noise was getting to me, making a shambles of my life. I felt I must do something. I felt I had to start with him with his honking horn . . ."

"Margie, may I ask you a question?"

"Of course, Walter," she said, looking into his soft gray eyes.

"If noise bothers you so much, why do you play your stereo so loud?"

"It's a way of drowning out the rest of the noise. The typing, the fighting, the incredible snoring, those damned tennis balls bouncing all over the place."

Walter said tenderly, "I understand, Margie. I do understand." Rather surprising himself, he took her in his arms. "The typing and the fighting and the tennis balls all drive me crazy, too. The funny thing is that to me the stereo was just as bad."

"Where it was really quiet, I wouldn't need the stereo. You know, to my generation that music is not noise the way it is to yours. It's just something to cover up the horror, like Clearasil. But with nothing to cover up, I wouldn't need it."

Walter was on the verge of kissing her. "Did you ever feel as though all the noise was a big conspiracy, just aimed at you?"

She nodded.

"So have I. I know just how you feel. But it's funny. You mentioned snoring. I never noticed the snoring."

"How could you miss it?" She smiled. "Excuse me."

She disappeared into the bedroom. Walter watched the doorway, waiting for her return. He had known many women, but he felt himself in love for the first time.

She reappeared naked. Walter's heart was in his throat, for this time he noticed everything about her trim young body.

But a man can't notice everything, as he might have reflected a moment later, staring up at the ceiling from a pool of his own blood.

Walter would never snore again.

You'd be surprised at the people who steal these days. Not just the kids. Adults who are well dressed and well off. People you'd never suspect.

Candy Store

By Gene Murray

MRS. MEYERS SAT ON A PIANO STOOL behind the old fashioned candy counter with her bifocals balanced precariously on the end of her nose. A rebellious lock of gray hair cascaded down her forehead, and she casually brushed it back without interrupting the figure work she was doing in her small spiral notebook. The bell attached to the door broke the silence, and a tall and tired-looking woman entered the store.

"Good morning," said Mrs. Meyers. "Can I help you?"

"Oh, no thank you. I know what I want." She poked through the candy selection and picked out a pack of gum and two chocolate bars.

"This will be all." She handed a dollar bill over the counter, took her change and walked toward the back of the store.

"I'm sorry, dear, that door is locked. You'll have to use the front door," Mrs. Meyers called out. "That one has been closed up for years."

"Really?" the other woman said. "How strange. That door opens onto a main street. I would think you would leave it open to attract more customers."

"Well, it *would* attract more customers, that's for certain. The problem is that it *would also* attract more thieves." She closed the notebook a little reluctantly and leaned on the counter top. "In this day and age you can't trust anything on two legs. I have enough trouble keeping an eye on just one exit. If that other one were open, people would steal me blind."

"I know just what you mean," the tall woman offered. "It's getting so that you can't trust anyone these days." She reached into her purse

and brought out cigarettes and a lighter. She inhaled deeply and settled in for a long conversation.

"That's right," said Mrs. Meyers. "And you'd be surprised at the type of people who steal things nowadays. It's not just the kids. It's adults who are well dressed and well off. People you'd never suspect." She took off her glasses, and as she rubbed her tired eyes she sized up her customer. She noticed that the woman's house coat was about two sizes too big for her and was frayed at the sleeves.

"It really is a shame," the tall woman said. She was leaning on the counter now and looking for a place to flick her cigarette ash. "But I'll tell you what bothers me the most about all of this thievery. All the honest people are being made to suffer for what the crooks are doing. It seems like people are just waiting for you to steal something so they can pounce on you. It really does bother me sometimes."

Mrs. Meyers wiped her bifocals with her apron. She held them up to the light to inspect them and said, "When I first started working here, eighteen years ago, we had standing orders from the owner to extend credit to customers, even if we had only seen them once or twice before. Never lost any money on that policy either, because people just didn't think of stealing in those days. Now he has to write off almost two thousand a year in pilferage. Terrible, just terrible."

The tall woman stood up and straightened her hat. "I've always wondered if people plan that kind of thing or if they do it on impulse." She snubbed out her cigarette and buttoned up her coat.

"Who knows? There's just no figuring people. I just wish I had quit this job and moved to Florida like I wanted to ten years ago."

"Well, why didn't you?"

"My husband said we couldn't afford it. Now he's dead, God rest his soul, and I'm stuck here."

"Don't give up hope. Maybe you'll make it to Florida yet." The woman waved and stepped out the door. The bell attached to the door rang and echoed in the empty store.

Mrs. Meyers went back to the bookkeeping in her spiral notebook. She said softly to herself, "Maybe I will."

A FEW WEEKS LATER, THE TALL WOMAN WAS BACK in the store picking out her favorite candies.

"Oh," she said. "I see you've got that back door boarded up now."

The balding, middle-aged man behind the counter said, "I beg your pardon?"

"Oh the last time I was in here I was discussing your crime problem with the lady that works here. Where is she, by the way? Not sick I

hope. She seemed like such a nice woman."

He shook his head slowly and sadly. "No, I don't think she's sick."

"Oh, my. You don't mean . . ."

"No, no. She's probably quite healthy. You see I'm the owner of this store and up until last week I didn't realize what kind of a crime problem we have here." His face flushed and his voice raised in anger.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," she said.

"Mrs. Meyers didn't show up one day and I had to come in and work the store for the first time in years. When things got slow I checked over the books and found quite a few irregularities." He pointed to the spiral notebook laying on the counter top.

"Irregularities?"

"That's the term my accountant used. It seems that in the course of eighteen years, my trustworthy Mrs. Meyers has embezzled almost eighteen thousand dollars."

ON A QUIET UNCROWDED BEACH NEAR MIAMI a frail, gray-haired woman sat on a beach chair reading the local newspaper.

"Just look at that," she muttered. "The crime rate is up again. Terrible, just terrible."

IN NEXT MONTH'S MSMM

WHAT HAS EVY DONE? by Michelle Lundgren

SLICES OF SYLVIA by Steven Utley

BEYOND A SHADOW by Susanne Shaphren

FOR THE GOOD OF SOCIETY by Jack Ritchie

ED NOON'S MINUTE MYSTERIES

By Michael Avallone

THE REAL GONE HORN

Toots Kelly was missing again. And his rich socialite wife Babs, paid me two thousand bucks to find him for her.

They were quite a couple. Made all the headlines. Kelly with his hot Dixieland trumpet was one of the most promising musicians in the country until he hit the bottle. Then he started hitting his wife and their marriage made all the scandal rags of the day rich.

But she loved him — or so she said. And now he had run out on her again. And she wanted me to find him before he really hit Skid Row.

I took the case. I did it by the numbers. I hit all the night clubs and side street cafes. Even Strip Row. But the managers all told me they'd never hire a drunken bum like Kelly no matter how great he'd once been. But finally the owner of the Blue Parrot told me about Lola the stripper, who had always wanted Toots and finally got Toots.

Sure enough, I crashed her dressing room at the Hot Angel on 52nd Street and there was Toots knee-deep in alcohol sleeping it off on Lola's bed. She put up quite a fuss, claiming that Toots needed her, wanted her, but I told her the guy belonged with his wife.

I poured ice water on him, fed him a gallon of coffee and told him I was taking him home. But he wouldn't leave without his trumpet.

Lola was fed-up by this time and screamed that he'd hocked his precious horn the day before to buy some giggle-water and flung the pawn ticket at him contemptuously. She was through with him.

But I had my job to do, so I drove him to the estate out in Nyack where Babs tearfully welcomed him home. But they started to argue the minute I backed my Buick out of the driveway. The morning papers gave me a jolt next morning. Babs Kelly was dead — her head bashed in with the famous Kelly trumpet — and what was far worse, the cops had pinned the murder on Toots.

That jarred me and I went down to Headquarters, where Monks let me talk to him. Kelly was in tears, hangover and all. He couldn't have killed her. I told him to take it easy.

In Monk's office, I looked over the inventory of items that had been taken from Kelly's pockets. Monks let me take the pawn ticket without a whimper. I told him I'd be back with something worthwhile.

I went to the pawnshop, where the music-minded clerk was amazed about the murder. He was equally amazed about the pawn-ticket, because he claimed that Toots had redeemed it only the week before. I thanked him and got out of there as he started to discuss Elvis Presley.

I looked up Lola again. I was waiting for her when she finished her last number. She made a face and sneered that hadn't I done enough — what more did I want? I smiled at her and told her about the pawn-ticket. She shook her head. It only went to show you, she said, how drunk a guy can get. Not remembering anything at all. Always cloudy and mixed-up about things.

I didn't buy that. Toots was drunk all right, he forgot things, but he just couldn't kill anybody. Certainly not with his trumpet. "But you could, Lola," I said. "You killed Babs and you know the lawyers can make a good case for Toots and you'd be willing to wait for him. You see, you made a couple of mistakes. Nice try, Lola. Better luck next time."

She went for a pearl-handled .22 on the bureau but I got to it before she did. She suddenly sighed and started crying. All she wanted to know was where she had slipped up.

THE SOLUTION

Famous musicians have only one instrument. They change a mouthpiece now and then but you never heard of a Cavaliero with two pianos or a Dorsev with two saxophones. It's like Bergren with McCarthy. So Toots Kelly's horn could only have been at the estate in Nyack if Lola had brought it there. She admitted she stashed the pawn-ticket bag to keep Kelly's horn as a keepsake, knowing he didn't remember so good anymore. But after I'd taken him home, she went out to Nyack to beg Babs to give him up. Kelly had been sleeping in the living room during the argument. A real gone man. He would have been gone for good too — if I hadn't rounded up his wife's murderer.

MIKE'S MAIL



TRASH?

Re: August 1980 issue: I hope you don't put a trashy story like "Conduct Unbecoming" by Sean McMartin in your magazine any more. Doing so, you're compromising with some of the lower class books on the bookrack. Dime-a-dozen type stories.

A Faithful Reader
Pine Bluff, Arkansas

My chief goal in MSMM is entertainment, but I'm aware that an occasional story is going to be controversial. If it's a good, solid, readable story, I generally don't turn it down because it might possibly raise some hackles in certain areas. On tap are several stories that were turned down by other magazines because of controversial elements, but I'd like to think that MSMM readers can cope with them. How about you other readers commenting on this.

LOONEY TUNE

A friend loaned me the August 1980 edition of MSMM. The story "Looney Tune" by Terry Black was one of the most enjoyable stories I have encountered in a long period of reading.

Richard R. Milewski
Los Alamitos, CA

Me, too.

CONDUCT OKAY

August was a good issue. I liked Terry Black's LOONEY TUNE very much, and also liked the Sean McMartin story. I'm looking forward to the Earl Drake story from Marlowe. Also looking forward to the two Phyllis issues, too.

James M. Reasoner
Azle, TX

OLD PAPERBACKS

I have a Mike Shayne paperback, *Dividend on Death*, #293, Copyright 1939, price-marked 35 cents.

I was wondering if you could tell me if it has any value to any collectors and if so could you please let me know.

I am still reading Mike Shayne paperbacks and have for many years. You see, I am 74 years old. I also have a Perry Mason #600, *The Stuttering Bishop*, published in 1936, priced at 35 cents.

I would be grateful if you could tell me how I can get in touch with someone who would be interested.

Margaret Kiehl
107 Grillo St.
Glassboro, NJ 08028

The value of an item seems to be determined by its scarcity and the demand for it, not by its age. There are U.S. coins, for example, minted within the past 80 years that are more valuable to collectors than Roman coins two thousand years old, simply because there are comparatively few of the U.S. coins around while large numbers of Roman coins have been unearthed.

Some months ago I picked up several Mike Shayne paperbacks including Dividend on Death, in a used book store for three for a dollar. I don't know about the Perry Mason, but I suspect the same thing applies. Sorry about that, Margaret. Someone wrote me recently with the news that the October 1979 MSMM was being sold for \$4.50. This was the issue in the warehouse when it caught fire, so there are fewer of that particular one around.

SINGLE BRICKBAT

A neighbor just loaned me the August issue of MSMM, and I'm impressed. Your mag is new to me, but I'm already hooked.

I liked the MS novel and Minute Mystery — I solved it — and adored LOONEY TUNE. Glad to see you have bought more from T. Black.

Bouquets for all your stories, but a single brickbat for "Strange, But True." When you want silly, leave it to Terry Black; he does a great job — just so Disney and other cartoonists don't put out a contract on him!

Ann Powell
Costa Mesa, CA

NOT FUNNY

Invite me to the execution of the party responsible for the STRANGE, BUT TRUE. Strange they are — funny they ain't.

Harry C. Krang
Toronto, Canada

The person responsible for the STRANGE, BUT TRUE items is the Editor Himself (me), Harry. Sometimes I see a lot of white space between stories and I'm reluctant to just crank in the usual coming-next-month or coming-in-future-issues-(maybe) blurbs — which gets to be like slicing salami rather than doing something creative. What amazes me are the varied reactions to this nonsensical stuff. Some people just accept it as filler material. Others love it. Still others hate it beyond all reason. I'll be on the lookout for lynch mobs — and thanks for the warning.

I generally don't cut letters, but I did slice out a good chunk of yours in which you complained (with reason) about the April fiasco. There just doesn't seem to be any point in going over the same territory. It did serve a good purpose in one respect: now I'm personally checking every word, comma and etcetera just before the book goes to the printer, so from the August issue on, if there are any errors, blame me for not catching them.

NOT FAIR

Thank you for returning my manuscript to me. However, I do not believe that you read my story entirely. Probably, you hastily read a few lines, a paragraph at the most, and since it did not strike your fancy you decided to reject the story, but to term it as "not meeting our present editorial needs" is not fair. Before submitting my story, I had carefully read your requirements in the Writer's Special Month Market of May. Under the requirements, I read "mystery, suspense and horror stories, 100 to 5,000 words." As a matter of fact, "The Spell" is a horror story although I called it an eerie story. Had you read the entire manuscript, you would have seen that it fits the category, even the amount of words which is 2000 words.

Unfortunately, beginner writers have no chance with well-known publications, but I thought your publication would be fair to beginners. However, it seems that you, like the rest of the publishers, give no opportunity to the unknown, struggling writers who seek to establish themselves. Well, I must say that rejecting my story is your loss and some other publisher's gain. If you wish to reconsider, please let me know.

Mrs. Rachel Goldman
Baltimore, MD

There is more to getting published than having the right word length and the right category. Every story is read completely through, even if it might be obvious somewhere along the line that it's unsuitable for MSMM. As for beginners, we've had first stories from Susan Szafranski in the January issue; Diane Chapman in April; Peg Fellows in May; Terry Black in August; and Vicki Shaull Carleton in November; others are coming up in future issues. I suspect there have been some, too, who didn't tell me it was a first sale.

Name value is important, but the story's the thing. I've bounced submissions by well-known authors (some of them friends of mine) because I didn't like the stories and didn't think the readers would either. As a writer, I've been selling stories for nearly thirty years — and I still get rejections; it's one of the occupational hazards. A recently sold story collected rejection comments which indicated one editor liked things that another hated, and vice versa. Just keep sending your story out as long as you have faith in it, and as long as there are magazines that might be interested in it.

(More Mike's Mail on Pages 95 & 109)

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Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

One of the most important recent events in mystery publishing is the debut of Raven House Mysteries by Harlequin of Canada (not to be confused with the Raven Book series published by Abelard-Schuman, Ltd. or Raven Books, Bob Samolian's Southern California bookshop). In preparation for some time, the new series is expected to reach the same heights of popularity as the famous Harlequin Romances which have been standard fare in their field for many years.

The first eight titles in the new series are now out. They are: *Death in the Past* (Richard A. Moore), *Drilling for Death* (John Wolfe), *The Dear Departed* ("Anne Butron"), *Murder Takes a Wife* (James A. Howard), *The Crossword Mystery* (Robert B. Gillespie), *Red is for Shrouds* (Mary Ann Taylor), *Crimes Past* ("Mary Challis"), and *Rain With Violence* ("Dell Shannon"). All are priced at \$1.75 and appear in a uniform paperback format with a distinctive yellow cover. According to Wally Exman of Harlequin, who is the editor for the new series, most of the titles to come in the series, at the rate of one a week, will be originals with some reprints of exceptionally good material.

According to available reports, Harlequin intends to spend some \$2 million promoting this new series on TV. It is interesting to note that all of the authors so far are members of the *Mystery Writers of America*. In preparing new titles for the series Harlequin is going for top drawer talent, as witness the fact that they have secured Hillary

Waugh, who has played such a vital role in the development of the police procedural, to be on their list.



Another debut you will want to know about is the magazine *CLUES: a Journal of Detection*, which is put out by the Bowling Green University Popular Press (Bowling Green, Ohio 43403). At present it is announced to appear twice a year at a subscription rate of \$10, or \$5 per individual copy. The first issue contains a collection of 21 articles on mystery literature with particular attention to the work of John D. MacDonald and his close friend, Travis McGee. Good reading and essential for the serious student of the mystery.



Dan Fortune, the one-armed private eye, makes a new appearance in *The Slasher* by Michael Collins (Dennis Lynds). Dan operates in Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, where he is likely to tread on the toes of Lew Archer, who is also well known in those parts. The story is complicated, the cast is large, but the solution is viable as it reaches into the far past, also like his distinguished colleague. Tightly written with good use of background and lots of attention-holding movement from start to finish. (Dodd Mead, \$7.95)



A lightweight effort to be read for fun only is *The Spy Game* by Marc Lovell. Our hero is a would-be professional agent whose misfortune it is to stand out in the crowd: he is six-feet-seven. When some Russian performers giving ESP demonstrations come to London, a possible defector is reported among them. Lots of enjoyment along the way, but the ending can't be taken seriously, unless you believe in ESP over vast distances. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$8.95)



Ciphered by Scott Keech is a rather long and quite talky mystery with one difference: this time the cop gets the girl. However, it is distracting to encounter so many rhetorical questions and incorrect tenses which unavoidably sidetrack the reader's attention. The use of an actual cypher in the story is interesting when it finally appears, but

it is not momentous. Alas, even Joan Kahn nods. (Harper and Row, \$9.95)



Definitely intended for lady readers is *The Bishop in the Back Seat* by Clarissa Watson. In her second appearance, artist and art gallery director Persis Willum mingles with the super rich who crave fame as art collectors. She maneuvers her way through the theft of valuable canvases and murder in a manner that is almost indecently chaste. The author knows her art world well, but when she comes to her finale, she goes off the deep end into total unbelievability. Apart from this, the proud rich take a good lacing as they try to outdo each other in status. A local politician leads the pack. In this day and age it is difficult to believe an attractive and once married young lady would be quite so prim. Perhaps

Persis Willum
Needs to be more Willin'.

(Walker and Co., \$9.95)



Here are some recent paperbacks that will be of interest: *The Mystery of Agatha Christie* by Gwen Robyns is one of several books devoted to the late master of the subtle swindle. The author is a well-known biographer. She has done Dame Agatha well, with the aid of many interesting illustrations. (Penguin, \$2.95). At least a semi-classic in the field is Gavin Black's *The Eyes Around Me* which is out in a nice new edition by Perennial (Harper and Row) at \$1.95. Nicholas Blake's Nigel Strangeways appears in *The Dreadful Hollow*, also from Perennial at \$1.95. Britain's Julian Symons, whose reputation in the field as both critic and author is secure, is newly published in Perennial with two titles: *Bogue's Fortune*, which is one of the less common works, and *The Broken Penny*. Grand opera is the setting for *The Forza Trap* by Kenn Davis (Avon \$1.95). Is it possible to scare someone to death when he is asleep? To find out, try *The Nightmare Machine* by John Nicholas Datesh (Belmont Towers Books, \$1.75).

It may be an illusion, but it seems that some very good titles are coming out in paperback at prices lower than the recent peak. Production costs have soared in publishing as in most other areas, but it is encouraging to note that efforts are being made to hold the line. Since every little bit helps, to all publishers who are working to keep interest high and prices relatively low, we tender our sincere thanks. ●

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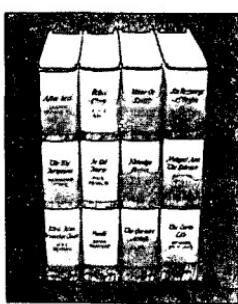
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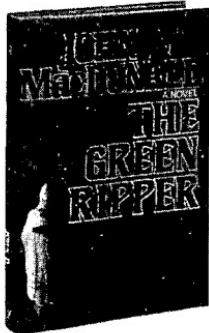
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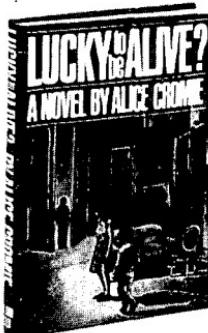
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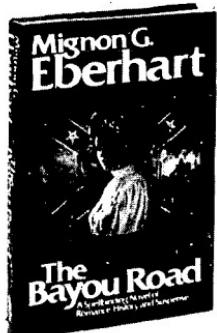
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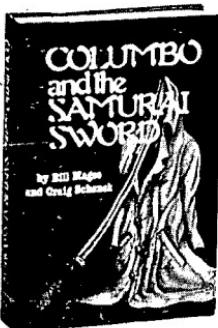
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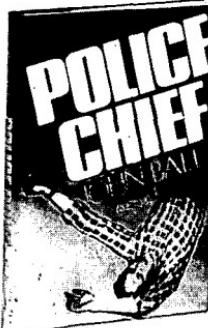
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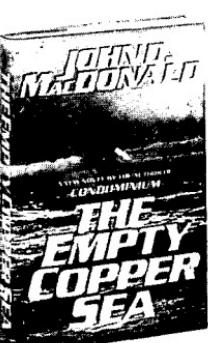
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